

# Aspects

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## Wings

*The piercing, melancholy screech echoes through the valleys and hills. The worker raises his head, eyes pivot skyward to discover the eagle gliding across the invisible pathways of the sky. Riding the warmer currents and updrafts from its lofty sweep, the bird scans the ground for movement and prey.*

*Effortlessly the eagle coasts across the skies, large wings outstretched, broad tail flared. She is the very picture of freedom, of a life freed from the bothersome constraints of gravity. She floats and soars through space, wheels high over the trees . . .*

*And the worker is envious, regretting that he, too, cannot know such exhilarating freedom.*

### Earthbound

A number of years ago, in another place and time, I wrote and performed the narration for a new worship musical. The church for which this musical was written did not have the traditions for enthusiastic, demonstrative worship, so there was really nothing in the production that might have been called 'charismatic.' This church body was conservative in their worship, with a large contingent of venerables, and it was not my purpose to offend, but to encourage all of us into a closer, more authentic worship experience of our God.

The Holy Spirit was alive and well, of course. Before the musical (which was performed during the Sunday morning service), the Music Minister, Deacon Chairman and I met for prayer. Those few closeted moments in themselves became a time of anointed worship as we bared our souls and intentions before the Lord, and placed all of our talents and gifts upon His altar. Through the ministry of the Spirit, it was a time of exquisite, bone-wracking communion with God.

The musical went well. Those who participated — both in the choir and in the pews — experienced a genuine time of worship and praise. While the worship was understated, leaning more toward instruction than dancing in the aisles, there were still a few moments in which the Spirit prodded some of us toward such things as spontaneous praise and the reverent lifting of hands.

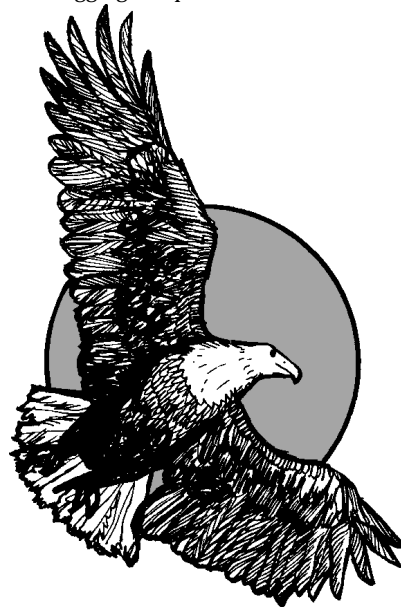
As the worship leader, however, I was in a good position to observe those in the congregation, and I wasn't surprised to see some discomfort, even disgust, on the faces of some. And so I also was not surprised by a conversation I had a few days later with one of the church members — a leader not only in that local body, but in the regional association as well. This conversation, while polite at both ends, became for me a benchmark illustration for those who are remarkably fearful of soaring too close to God.

Yet those who hope  
in the Lord  
Will gain new strength;  
They will mount up with  
wings like eagles,  
They will run  
and not get tired,  
They will walk  
and not become weary.

*Isaiah 40:31 NASB<sup>1</sup>*

Over the course of a 90-minute telephone conversation this gentleman explained to me that this was just not how we were to do things here. At great length he pointed out that not only was he, personally, not interested in worshipping in such a manner, but that *neither were we to do it*. To him, the practice of a more demonstrative worship, such as the raising of hands in praise — indeed, even worship itself — was just a fad, just a gimmick. His contention was that believers in his denomination worshipped by fellowshiping with each other. Churches that are worship-oriented, he said, traditionally die out, whereas churches that are fellowship-oriented grow in number. We shouldn't be demonstrative in a worship service; it's just "not necessary, and not a [his denomination] thing."

This brother in Christ finished the conversation by making what I found to be a rather remarkable statement. I was left dumbfounded when this church leader said, "People like you are on a higher spiritual plane, and we want you to quit dragging us up to God."



We are a body of equal saints before the Lord, and there will always be those uncomfortable in His presence.

### Wanting to be Close

The result of that eye-opening conversation so long ago was a renewed determination on my part to never deny the powerful Spirit living within me, to never deny the yearning I have to live every day of my life closer to God than the day before.

Actually my friend was correct about one thing: No one should be 'dragging' anyone else up to God; that is the work of the Spirit. Every believer in Christ is equipped with the same connections to God, and it is never another person's responsibility to drag anyone else kicking and screaming toward the throne.

My Christian brother failed to understand one important point about worship, however. What he interpreted to be worship that was self-glorifying, was in reality a personal determination to connect more intimately with God. We raise our hands in prayer, worship or praise in an effort to be closer to Him, in an effort to raise our love up to Him — which is precisely what worship is all about! Just as a simple child lifts her arms up to her daddy when he steps in the door, we lift up our hands, crying, “Abba, Father, I love You!”

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The mechanics of worship or daily living are not nearly so important as the question of whether or not we choose to rise into the holiness of God. If we love this earth, we are probably not loving God sufficiently.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” *Matthew 6:24 NKJV*

There is something more than a little scary about a child of God not wishing to be closer to his parent. When we receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of personal redemption, we also receive a direct, almost umbilical-like link to the Father.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.  
*Romans 8:15-16*

What has happened in our own spirit when that connection has become frayed? What has happened to our system of priorities when the things of this earth take precedence over the things of God?

## Through His Eyes

*The eagle waddles across the field in her ungainly gait. Her head bobs and weaves, her body switches back and forth. The large bird, her attention elsewhere, steps into a softer depression and finds herself sunk past her claws into the sucking mud. She flaps her long wings and, for just a moment, is held tightly in the earth’s grasp.*

—

When my dad died, now almost twenty years ago, though a Christian, I was ill-equipped to deal with the sinking morass of that traumatic moment. His death was, to say the least, untimely and, in my eyes, profoundly unfair. After working hard all his life to support his family, he was now looking forward to retirement. For the first time in their lives, he and Mom would not have to be watching and squeezing every last penny; it would be a pleasant and well-deserved rest from the rigors of daily labor.

But then he died, and I could see no logic at all in God’s timetable. And there was a moment during the traditional schedule of events associated with a death when I found myself huddled in Mom and Dad’s basement, weeping over the loss, but more angry than sad. Where was the justice in this? Why, with all the loathsome creeps out there in the world — men for whom there seemed to be no purpose behind their sorry lives — why did God have to take a good and decent man from his family?

At that moment I was mired in the sucking muck of the earth. Whatever was going on around me was all I could see, and to the extent that eternal things would not jibe with my thought process, they were inconsequential.

## A Pleasant Myopia

We can all recall those moments in which we were mired in the mud and muck of the earth — moments in which the eternal things of God became for us, if not invisible, at least irrelevant. There are times when our horizon draws close in around us; people and events outside our shortsighted vision simply cease to exist.

Not all such moments are necessarily unpleasant, or as traumatic as the death of a loved one. There are good times in life when all our happiness and joy seem to be wrapped up inside the earthly events around us —

- when we see our lovely bride walking down the aisle toward us
- when we get a raise because of all the hard work we’ve put in
- when we catch a first glimpse of our new child
- when we admire something built with our own hands.

Even in moments of joy we can still be sinking deeper into the muck of temporal life — we’re just feeling good as we go down.

Jesus was once approached by a nice young man who, though seeking something better, was not at all unhappy with the events of his life.

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”  
“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do

not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’” “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” *Luke 18:18-24*

This inquisitive man was thoroughly stuck in the mire, and sinking fast. All he could see were his vast acquisitions, and in his estimation they were more important than life with God Himself. He was willing to exchange eternal life for temporal goods; no wonder he ‘became very sad.’

To soar, one must first lift one’s feet off the ground. To rise above this shallow temporal plane, one must first reject the notion that this familiar environment is the best there is.

I imagine there was no small amount of fear in my friend’s strident opinion against worship. Sunday church for him had become something predictable and comfortable. He could look forward to walking into a familiar building, shaking hands with old friends, chatting over common interests and, while they were at it, singing a few familiar old hymns and hearing a little preaching. All that finished off with pot roast and potatoes would, for him, comprise ‘worship,’ and he could not permit anything outside that pattern to threaten his comfortable traditions.

In varying degrees we’re all like that. Tradition and habit combine to create a predictable pattern that we nurture, and protect from any new, external threats. And in our myopia, we come to believe that what has become familiar is the best there is. Our fear is that by releasing

ourselves into something possibly better, we might lose some of what we already have.

For the Christian there should be no argument, for there is nothing of this world superior to God. The fact that Jesus left us here for awhile, to live upon the earth before uniting with Him, should not be taken as His opinion that it is in any way superior. While He wanted us to remain —

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one.

— Jesus made our ultimate citizenship clear.

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

*John 17:11,15-16*

### **Not of This World**

We are not of this world, and so long as we cling to it, we will remain unformed, and unhappy. The Christian has God living inside him, and the more his feet remain stuck in the muck of this earth, the more miserable will be his spirit.

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
Sung by flaming tongues above;  
Praise His name — I'm fixed upon it —  
Name of God's redeeming love.

Hitherto Thy love has blest me;  
Thou hast bro't me to this place;  
And I know Thy hand will bring me  
Safely home by Thy good grace.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Bought me with His precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;  
Seal it for Thy courts above. Amen.

*Robert Robinson*

The closer we  
are to God,  
the more we share  
His vision.

Every soul belongs to God and exists by His pleasure. God being who and what He is, and we being who and what we are, the only thinkable relation between us is one of full Lordship on His part and complete submission on ours. We owe Him every honor that it is in our power to give Him. Our everlasting grief lies in giving Him anything less.

The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all we step out of the world's parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world, and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new and different psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its upsurings and its outgoings. *A.W. Tozer*<sup>2</sup>

## As Far as the Eye Can See

*The bird at last frees itself from the possessing muck, flaps its wings to lift up and above the muddy field. Once returned to her best environment, she inhales the breath of joyous freedom, gliding easily over the land that just moments before had held her tight in its embrace.*

*Trapped on the ground, her world had consisted of the immediate predicament, but now free, her world reaches toward the far distant horizon. Now her sharp eyes gaze beyond the trees, over the rolling hills, across the valleys. Now she sees the lay of the land, the perils that lie just beyond, and*

*once hidden from her sight. Now she spies the scampering prey that will become her meal, and she swoops down, silent, and with accurate aim.*

### **Take Me Higher**

There are many mountains and tall hills in the deserts of the Southwest, and I've climbed a few. On solitary treks I've clambered up the sides of many a rough and tumbled slope, grasping for purchase upon sun-baked stone or sliding sand.

Whatever the locale or terrain, every slope always came with a standard set of decisions to be made — and the one most pressing would always be, *How high should I go?*

Since I am something less than a superior example of the male physical potential, this decision would present itself with alarming regularity. Every fifty feet or so would come the need to sit awhile and consider my options.

Resting atop a convenient rock after shucking my load of gear, sipping something wet and cool, I would contemplate the remarkable beauty of the panoramic view that lay before me. A wide 180 degree view would be spread before me, far more than I had seen from the ground — or even from my previous resting stop. And I would always consider the option to stop where I was and enjoy the wide view, saving myself from the effort needed to climb higher.

But usually I would press on toward the higher reward. For you see, on the side of the mountain the view is 180 degrees, but from the top, just a little higher, the view is twice as wide. From the comfortable side of the mountain one can see far into the distance, and scan wide left to right. But on the mountain *top* one can pivot in any direction, in a 360-degree circle, taking in the complete view, all around and as far as the eye can see.

### **An Historic Perspective**

The closer we are to God, the more we share His vision. There is no one higher than the Lord, and from His vantage point the view is limitless.

*A prayer of Moses the man of God.*

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. *Psalm 90:1-4*

Man's perspective is limited, his frame of reference brief. But God sees around the bends in life, and while it is true that we will never know precisely what lies around the corner, the closer we soar to God the less we will concern ourselves with what is there.

God's perspective is at once historic, contemporary, and prescient. He sees yesterday as well as today, and tomorrow as clearly as the day before.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

*Rev. 1:8*

The historian's perspective on current events is superior to that of the person who lives only in today. This perspective certainly does not guarantee comfort, but it does guarantee context, and a superior foresight regarding the consequences of actions.

- The one who lives only in today may consider it expedient to appease such contemporary rulers as Saddam Hussein, but the historian knows what resulted when Great Britain's Neville Chamberlain — along with most of the rest of the world — appeased Adolf Hitler in 1938: World War Two.
- The one who lives only in today may see no harm in electing corrupt and amoral leaders — men or women without moral sense or principles, incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong. As long as they do their civic job, where's the harm? The historian knows, however, that the ignominious end such societies quickly reach that follow that path of logic.
- The one who lives only in today may be troubled over both natural and contrived tragedies that cost many lives, sensing trends that will continue unabated. But the historian, while experiencing just as much sorrow over the loss, knows that such tragedies have occurred throughout time; they are the natural ebb and flow of this earth and its people.

The more we keep God at arm's length, the smaller we feel in comparison to Him. Distant from Him, we feel inferior, manipulated, helpless; it becomes easier to think of Him in mechanical terms, like some great and mysterious mechanized beast — uncaring and unknowable. Though supposedly aligned with Him, when our spirits remain detached, it becomes easier to think of Him in almost hostile terms.

When my dad died I was angry at God, and as much as cursed Him for being so stupid and unfeeling as to take the wrong man. How dare He be so unfair! How dare He be so *wrong!* But that was a time when I had set myself far distant from God; that was a time when I was up to my neck in the muck of this earth and its ways. In my condition — in my distance from God — it would have been impossible for me to have His perspective. Had I been closer — had my spirit been in closer

communion with His — I would have felt just as much the pain and loss of my dad, but I would have been comforted in the moment by the clarity of God's perspective.

Standing at the bottom of God's mountain we can feel only small and insignificant. Gazing upward from our earthbound perspective, His lofty heights appear to lie beyond our grasp. They seem unattainable. If we but begin climbing, however, one stone at a time, we immediately leave the clutching grip of the soil. Though still far away from the peak, we immediately begin to see it draw nearer — and the earth become smaller.

The higher we climb, the more accurate our view becomes, for we are then able to take in a broader sweep. From our higher vantage point, we can see the sturdy rock within reach of the quicksand; we can see the water hole that lies just a few feet beyond the dry desert; and we can see the cool oasis that lies just beyond the next sun-parched dune.

## **Soaring Higher**

Because he was unwilling to soar into the heights, my friend who was so adamantly against drawing closer to God had a very small view of God's Kingdom here on earth. Because for him 'worship' consisted of chatting over punch and sheet cake, he also had a very small view of his God.

The higher we soar toward God, the more we will have His context and perspective.

- When trials come, we'll be willing to accept them as simply part of His plan for our life — something for our good.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the

testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. *James 1:2-4*

- When we are confused and persecuted, we will understand that such things occur for His glory.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. *2 Cor. 4:8-10*

- When we are feeling insecure, we will place even greater trust in the Lord who cares about our lives.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" *Hebrews 13:5-6*

By soaring closer to God's higher plane, we have nothing to lose, but oh, so much more to gain.

—  
I'm pressing on the upward way,  
New heights I'm gaining every day;  
Still praying as I'm onward bound,  
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

My heart has no desire to stay  
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;  
Though some may dwell where these abound,  
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

I want to live above the world,  
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;  
For faith has caught the joyful sound,  
The song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height,  
And catch a gleam of glory bright;  
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,  
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground."

#### Refrain

Lord, lift me up and let me stand,  
By faith, on heaven's tableland,  
A higher plane than I have found;  
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

*Johnson Oatman, Jr.*

## Born of the Spirit

*Reaching its nest, the male eagle greets his mature young with the freshly-killed prey. Before they are given the food, however, he once again coaxes them out of the nest, encouraging them to fly for themselves. Petrified at the thought of leaving the security and stability of the nest they, once again, refuse.*

### Letting Go

Soaring is born of the Spirit, the result of living day in and day out with God through communion with the Holy Spirit. We must first realize that the Spirit is in residence, then we must come to understand how He works. More than anything else, we must not be afraid to tap into this rising pathway to holiness. For the Christian, the presence of the Spirit is not optional, but using Him as a continual glide-path to God is.

Many years ago there was a member of the Sanhedrin who was reluctant to embrace the totality of Christ's experience. Part of him wanted desperately to believe, but part of him was also fearful of what others would think, how it would affect his reputation. Nicodemus was afraid to lift his feet off the ground.

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**Jesus enters. His mood is contemplative. As he sits, he bows his head in prayer. In a few moments, Nicodemus enters.**

**Nicodemus:** *(formally, yet with an underlying air of anticipation)* Rabbi, I don't mean to intrude. Your disciple outside gave me entrance.

**Jesus:** You are welcome, councilor.

**Nicodemus:** I'm Nicodemus.

**Jesus:** And I'm honored by a member of the Sanhedrin. What brings you at such a late hour?

**Nicodemus:** *(after thinking for a moment; looking about)* Discretion.

**Jesus:** *(with a knowing smile)* Ah yes. Discretion.

**Nicodemus:** Please, don't think ill of me. I am just . . . cautious. Even I have my detractors; there are those who would not be pleased with my speaking with you.

**Jesus:** And why have you come to speak with me? And in the middle of the night?

**Nicodemus:** *(anxiously; going to Jesus)* Questions. I can no longer trust the information that falls on my ears. Too many around me offer answers that have little to do with the truth. *(firmly)* And I want to know the truth.

**Jesus:** The truth can, at times, be disturbing.

**Nicodemus:** *(sarcastically)* More disturbing than the council?

**Jesus:** What do you think is the truth about me?

**Nicodemus:** *(choosing his words carefully)* Well, we know that you have come as a teacher from God. You must be from God; no one could perform these miracles, unless God is with him.

**Jesus:** I tell you the truth, unless one is born again, he cannot even see the kingdom of God.

**Nicodemus:** *(shaking his head; almost interrupting)* They warned me you would speak in mysteries! All right. My first question: How can a man be "born" when he is already old? Is this one of your mysteries? Have you devised a way for a man to re-enter his mother's womb and be born for a second time?

**Jesus:** You are born of your mother once. But unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you will not enter the kingdom of God. *(Nicodemus tries to interrupt)* No, listen. You came seeking the truth, and the truth is, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit.

**Nicodemus:** *(keying off the word "water")* Uh...the water. You said "water." Now, we Jews have always had the baptism by water. Is this what you refer to? Must one be a Jew first?

**Jesus:** But you only baptize those new to the faith.

**Nicodemus:** *(chiding himself)* Of course, it's only for the Gentiles. *(trying a different angle)* Many have associated you with the baptizer, John. Is this the water you speak of?

**Jesus:** Those who are baptized by John, do so as a symbol of their repentance. It is an act of submission to God. And with that repentance comes the Spirit. *(Nicodemus is still unsure)* Don't try to reason through it. Nicodemus, when the wind hits your face and you hear it whistle by your ears, you know it is a real thing, don't you? Yet, you have no idea of its origin — or its destination. You only know that it is real. The Spirit is from God. You cannot see it, or touch it, or know where it is going. But you can feel it. It is real.

**Nicodemus:** Rabbi, I mean no disrespect, but, *(throwing up his hands)* how can this be? *(struggling)* You are either the wisest man that has ever lived or, you . . . well, that is . . .

**Jesus:** *(with gentle incredulity)* And you, the teacher of Israel, don't understand these things? You came to me for truth.

**Nicodemus:** I came to you for answers.

**Jesus:** Do you wish only answers that are pleasing to the ear? I tell you what I know and have seen — and still you don't believe me!

**Nicodemus:** But I *want* to believe!

**Jesus:** Nicodemus, I have spoken to you of earthly things and you don't believe; how can I speak to you of *heavenly* things?

**Nicodemus:** From where do you get your knowledge of heaven?

**Jesus:** No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came *from* heaven — the Son of Man.

**Nicodemus:** And, you are . . .

**Jesus:** (*affectionately*) Nicodemus, you know it already. That's why you came to me tonight. You knew it up here — in your mind; you came tonight so that you might know it here — in your heart.

**Nicodemus:** Do you realize what you're saying?

**Jesus:** Yes, I know. Do *you*, Nicodemus? (*Jesus waits, while Nicodemus struggles with his response; then*) Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so too, the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him, may have eternal life. God loved the world so much, that He gave that world His one and only Son, that anyone who would believe in Him would not perish, but have eternal life! (*as Jesus exits*) Nicodemus, listen to your heart.

*Nicodemus is left alone to ponder what Jesus has said. As he struggles with His truth, he sings:*

Have I met Messiah?  
I want to believe,  
but the other Pharisees tell me  
He's out to deceive.  
Everything I've heard Him say  
and all I've seen Him do,  
make it hard to doubt  
that what His followers say is true.

Chorus:

If I follow Jesus,  
what will the people say?  
Will I be able to bear it  
If my family turns away?  
If I follow Jesus,  
the thought makes me afraid.  
But my soul keeps crying:  
Please don't turn away.

He wants a decision,  
but what am I to do?  
Risk my life and reputation  
on what He says is true?  
I don't know where He's going,  
But He says that He's The Way.  
And though it breaks my heart to leave,  
I know that I can't stay.

Chorus <sup>3</sup>

*As the music fades, Nicodemus turns to where Jesus exited.*

**Nicodemus:** (*excitedly: "wait for me!"*) Jesus!

**Nicodemus exits.** <sup>4</sup>

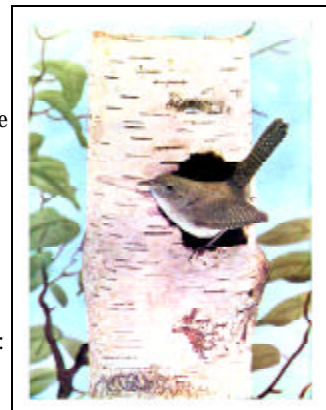
## A Small Faith

With much commotion, the tiny house rocked side to side, back and forth. For days prior there had been the insistent chattering of hungry mouths and the repetitious, monotonous flights of the parents bringing insects to their young. Once in awhile a small head would show itself at the small hole, then duck back inside where it was safe, protected.

Finally came the day when the last family of wrens were to venture out from the nest and meet life head-on. From now on they would be on their own — with no adult servants to bring them meals.

They were a reluctant pair, these last two children of the summer. With boisterous coaxing the mother wren squawked at the door, then flew off as if to demonstrate how easy it really was to fly. She waited, calling to her children from a nearby branch, but when they failed to emerge, she returned to the house to coax some more.

First the braver of the two edged his little body out the door, more and more, a little at a time, until suddenly, in the blink of an eye, he flew off. But his sibling was a tougher case. Time and again the mother returned to coax and cajole: "C'mon, you can do it. I gave you life, I gave you your wings. Trust me — you can fly!"



But the little one didn't yet trust his wings. It was a long way down from the house to the ground, and there were all kinds of scary sounds and scary beasts waiting out there. What if he fell! What if he plummeted straight down, never able to get up again? Oh no, he was safe and sound in this little house; there was no reason at all to venture out into the big world.

Then the impatient mother made one last trip back to the small opening. Her words were clearly interpreted, even by her furthest neighbors: "Now listen, you get your tiny butt out here *right now!*" She scolded.

Yes ma'am. In just a few seconds the baby bird cautiously edged his way out the opening. Suddenly, at the last moment, just as his unfolded wings came free of the hole, he swung out, clawing at the edge, afraid to let go. He tried to get back inside, but gravity was pulling him away. So he let go — half flying, half falling part way down the trunk of the tree, where he clung gasping for breath, waiting for his tiny heart to stop beating its way out of his chest. Then, a few seconds later, he flew off, never to be seen again.

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During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

*Matthew 14:25-31*

## A New Strength to Soar

*Her youngsters finally out on their own, the eagle shifts out onto the branch supporting her empty nest. Spreading her wings to their full extension, she silently lifts off into space. Circling higher, soaring ever higher with wing tips flared, she drifts upon the waves of heat rising up from the earth far below. The field worker lifts his gaze to the sun, and the black speck careening high overhead. He smiles, and bends back to his labor, envious of the bird's indomitable freedom.*

Old men generally shed their wings, and can only manage to crawl. They have done with romance. Enthusiasms are dead. Sometimes they cynically smile at their own past selves and their dreams. And it is a bad sign when an old man does that. But for the most part they are content (unless they have got Christ in their hearts) to keep along the low levels, and their soaring days are done. But if you and I have Jesus Christ for the life of our spirits, as certainly as fire sends its shooting tongues upwards, so certainly shall we rise above the sorrows and sins and cares of this 'dim spot which men call earth,' and find an ampler field for buoyant motion high up in communion with God.

Strength to soar means the gracious power of bringing all heaven into our grasp, and setting our affections on things above. As the night falls, and joys become fewer and life sterner, and hopes become rarer and more doubtful, it is something to feel that, though we are strangers upon earth, we can lift our thoughts yonder. If there be darkness here, still we can 'outsoar the shadow of night,' and live close to the sun in fellowship with God. Dear brethren, life on earth were too wretched unless it were possible to 'mount up with wings as eagles.' *Alexander Maclaren*

### **Expectant Dependence**<sup>5</sup>

Just about everything about God is reciprocal. Worship Him, and He fills the heart with song; pray to Him, and He brings comfort and consolation; serve Him, and He showers joy and blessings into a life. And, as the prophet tells us, those who find their hope in the Lord will be given new strength with which to walk, to run — to soar ever higher into His presence.

Those who are afraid to soar are afraid that they will lose something valuable by lifting their feet off the familiar soil of earth. In truth, however, they have everything to gain. The one who soars gains God's limitless vision and perspective. The one who hopes in the Lord has fewer reasons to hope in anything — or anybody — of this temporal plane.

The reluctance of some to live this way is really not surprising for, after all, what this type of living really entails is *surrender*, a frightening — even repulsive — contemplation for many. To "wait upon," to "hope in," to "wait for" the Lord means that we surrender our short-sighted, immediate aspirations to His limitless, eternal promises, and some people simply can't wait. We live in a world of immediate gratification — a world in which something's value diminishes exponentially with every minute one has to wait for its realization. Most people today haven't the patience to "wait for the Lord."

But God is more generous than that; He doesn't make us wait for everything. This promise is as much for today as it is for tomorrow, and eternity. Those who place their trust in the Lord of heaven receive an immediate result; He is a living God who is surely as alive in this minute as He is in the boundless minutes of our tomorrows. He doesn't want us to soar tomorrow, but *today!*

To "hope in" the Lord means that we surrender our short-sighted, immediate aspirations to His limitless, eternal promises.

The pursuit of God will embrace the labor of bringing our total personality into conformity to His. And this not judicially, but actually. I do not here refer to the act of justification by faith in Christ. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to His proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission which the Creator-creature circumstance makes proper.

The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all we step out of the world's parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world, and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new and different psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its upsurings and its outgoings. *A.W. Tozer*

All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender,  
Humbly at His feet I bow,  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,  
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

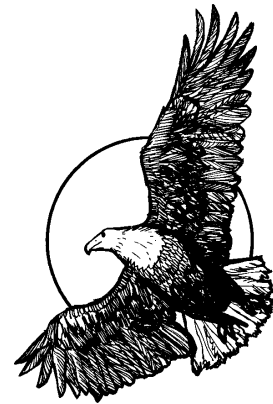
All to Jesus I surrender,  
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;  
Let me feel the Holy Spirit,  
Truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender,  
Lord, I give myself to Thee;  
Fill me with Thy love and power,  
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

### Refrain

I surrender all, I surrender all.  
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.

*Judson W. Van DeVenter*



## Notes:

- 1 This rendering uses the margin notes from the NASB translation, where "wait for" can alternatively be translated "hope in."
- 2 *The Pursuit of God* (Christian Publications, 1982), p102.
- 3 Words & Music by David Baroni & Niles Borop; from *The Old Rugged Cross*, by John Lee.
- 4 *To a New Life Born*, a retelling of John 3; Copyright 1986-1998 David S. Lampel/*His Company*.
- 5 But those who **hope in** the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. *Isaiah 40:31*  
**qavah**, kaw-vaw', Hebrew Stg 6960; a primitive root; to bind together (perhaps by twisting), i.e. collect; (figurative) to expect :- gather (together), look, patiently, tarry, wait (for, on, upon).

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 Phone: **515-462-1971** or **515-462-4027**.  
 Postal address: **2444 195th Trail, Winterset, IA 50273-8172**.  
 Internet address: **dlampel@aol.com**

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## With Thanksgiving

Linda and I have been sincerely grateful for subscribers who have expressed their appreciation with a gift. Our praise continues to be lifted up to God, as these contributions are seen as a sign of His affirmation of this work.

If you feel led by the Spirit to contribute, we would like to express our appreciation in a tangible way.

## Winter Reflections

We are preparing a series of booklets based on my weekly column, *Reflections by the Pond*. The first booklet in the series is called "Winter Reflections" — a collection of columns from winter months around the pond.

With your gift we would like to send you a copy of *Winter Reflections*. Simply request the booklet, and include your name and address when you send your gift; we'll express our sincere appreciation with this brand new booklet.

Here's a sample:

The Christian never loses the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Like the brown oak trees that surround the frozen pond, no matter how dead and lifeless the Christian appears on the outside, there is always extravagant life bubbling inside in the person of the Spirit. Like the dry brittle weeds of the winter field, the deep roots of the Spirit never die.

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth."  
 John 14:16

The Christian never loses his or her life-giving connection to God. Which sets us apart from the trees of the field. There will come a day when the death-like appearance of the tree will be real, when the spring bud will no longer form. There will come a day when the deeply hidden roots of the grass will indeed wither and die. But for the one who has placed his or her trust in Jesus Christ, that day will never come.

(from *Winter Reflections*)