

PROMISES AND PROVISIONS  
*There Shall Be Showers of Blessing* 165  
James McGranahan

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**A**HOT AUGUST NIGHT. No cooling breeze stirs past the open, white collars of the men, nor past the full skirts of the women. The old stained-glass windows are swung wide to the cloying humidity, two oscillating fans hum on either side of the empty choir loft. Cardboard funeral-home fans wave like fluttering cottonwood leaves across the rows of wooden pews.

A young boy sits between his parents thinking about other places he might be. Instead of sitting in an uncomfortable church pew, sweating in his white shirt, black slacks and dress shoes, he could be outside playing with his neighborhood friends. He could be up in his tree house, up near the higher breeze, imagining himself the lookout on a pirate ship. He could be nestled comfortably in his bedroom, reading of heroes, and adventures, and wild beasts in Africa. But here he sits, dog-eared hymnal in hand, singing the old songs with the rest of the congregation. Later the pastor will preach a Bible study, or perhaps there will be a visiting missionary showing his grainy, 16 mm film about the lost tribes of South America.

Decades later the young boy is now a middle-aged man. From time to time he again hears the familiar strains of those old, Sunday night hymns—

"Love Lifted Me"  
"Sunshine in My Soul"  
"I Love to Tell the Story"  
"Faith is the Victory!"  
"When the Roll is Called Up Yonder"

—and immediately he is back in that un-refrigerated church sanctuary on a hot August night. He can once again smell the old wood of the church, the fragrance of perspiration doused with perfume. He can hear the electric buzz of the fans, the mellow sound of the old piano, and the voices united in common bond.

And even as he is stirred by the music of those nostalgic echoes, he realizes that within his veins courses the very blood-flow of faith. It is part of him. It will never cease being a part of him.

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.

2 Timothy 1:5

Some might call what he feels the "Spirit." Some might call it the "bond of peace." Others more pragmatic might refer to it as the "fellowship of the saints," or his "Christian heritage."

Whatever it is called, he did not acquire it by osmosis. Though its roots extend back to his mewling days in a basket set between his mom and dad on the church pew shortly after his birth, it was not by inheritance from them that he gained his part in the church. But it was his faithful mom and dad that kept him in the place where the things of God would be comfortable and natural to him.

He would, over the years of his childhood and youth, inhale the abiding fragrance of old, substantial faith, of serious devotion to God, of the teachings and way of Christ. He would attend Sunday School, and stand on rickety risers to sing in the children's choirs at Christmas. He would listen to the sermons, the choir anthems, and absorb the earnest lives of those his senior.

And after that day so long ago when he walked the aisle during the Invitation hymn, his parents still kept him there, in the bosom of the church, listening to the well-worn wisdom of his elders, and singing the old hymns that even now connect him to that time and place.

He doesn't remember the words of the sermons he heard while growing up. There was no simple cause and effect relationship—as if the pastor one day offered the evidence, then, having concurred, he walked the aisle to shake his hand. But, small piece at a time, the gospel of Jesus was steadily poured into his heart, so that at the tender age of seven, he accepted Christ as his Savior.

All these influences came together to fashion a life—a new life—in Christ. In that holy, reverent setting of dark-stained wood and old smells, the pastor brought together in an orderly fashion all the pieces of evidence that, when in place, smoothed the way for the supernatural touch of the Holy Spirit.

Without the groundwork laid by family and friends, teachers and pastor, that Spirit call may have been rejected, or misunderstood. But because of the solid groundwork laid, that gentle Spirit needed only the briefest moment to nudge him into the Savior's arms.