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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. Then, one by one, they struggle into the air on their untried wings. • Her youngsters finally out on their own, the female 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 from the earth far below. Far below her 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.

LETTING GO

SOARING

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.

There once 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:

There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we all know you're

a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it." Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom." "How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?" Jesus said, "You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind hovering over the water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit. So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be 'born from above'—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it

comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God." Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?" Jesus said, "You're a respected teacher of Israel and you don't know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don't believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can't see, the things of God? No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life."

(John 3:1-15 *The Message*)

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 a while 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 last 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.

Boundless Tomorrows

Just about everything about God is reciprocal and unselfish. 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 really is not surprising for, after all, what this type of living entails is *surrender*, a frightening—even repulsive—contemplation for many. To “wait upon,” to “hope in,” to

*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.”*

“wait for” the Lord means that we surrender our shortsighted, 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. As a result, 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!

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 “out-soar 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)

*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.)*

