

INTRODUCTION

New School, Meet The Old School

A few years ago, I resigned from pastoring a wonderful church to take over a ministry that focuses on training Christian leaders in developing countries. My wife and I moved to a nice little college town with a good airport, intending to make it our home base. I thought my life would be all about traveling the world ... but God had other plans. What actually happened was that an army of spiritually hungry university students began gathering around us, filling our home, filling our day timers, asking us to help them grow in their Christian faith.



Hungry disciples crowd our table for Sunday night dinner.

We didn't try to create a ministry. You could say it was sort of a "perfect storm"—the lessons we had learned over the last twenty-five years of ministry in the U.S. and abroad just happened to be the things that these hungry young disciples of Jesus wanted to know.¹

What is it that this little army was so hungry for? Well, let's put it right out there on the table—it's a slightly different approach to the Christian life. I am not talking about a different Bible or a different gospel, but some significantly different ways of understanding things like prayer, spiritual warfare, and even God Himself. So just a heads-up to the "already Christian" reader—some of what you will be encountering in the coming pages may be new to you, but the fact is that it isn't really new at all. Most of it is simply the way Christians used to see things a century or more ago. I like to think of it as forgotten wisdom, it's the old school way.

I first discovered the old schoolers years ago when I was in Bible college, and to this day (three theological degrees later), I find them much more compelling than the vast majority of Christians in our time. I am talking about world-shakers like John Wesley (1703-1791), George Whitefield (1714-1770), Charles Finney (1792-1875), William Booth (1829-1912), Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), D.L. Moody (1837-1899), R.A. Torrey (1856-1928), George Müller (1805-1898), Andrew Murray (1828-1917), Oswald Chambers (1874-1917), and latecomers like Martin Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) and Leonard Ravenhill (1907-1994).

¹ Since the first edition of this book, we started The Refuge Fellowship Church (www.therefugefellowshipchurch.com). When people ask about its history I tell them, *We are just a discipleship ministry that got out of control.*

The old schoolers certainly have differences of opinion among themselves (some were Calvinists, some Arminians, some traditional high churchmen, some low, some were dispensationalists, some not, etc.). My interest lies in those areas where they share a profound agreement on spiritual realities (*keys*) that many Christians in our time have lost. This is where hungry disciples today can benefit the most. I will refer to the old schoolers for support, especially on points where I know today's readers may need some extra convincing—like the discussion in Chapter 4 on prayer or Chapter 5 on receiving the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

The content of this book is largely driven by conversations I find myself having again and again with young believers. They all seem to be interested in answering the same questions:

How can I know I am really saved? (Ch. 1)

Can God use me if I don't know the Bible well? (Ch. 2)

How do I keep from falling into sin? (Ch. 3)

How do I pray in a way that really works? (Ch. 4)

How do I experience the Holy Spirit's power? (Ch. 5)

Can Satan torment me if I am a Christian? (Ch. 6)

How can I know when God is speaking to me? (Ch. 7)

Do all Christians need to care about the poor? (Ch. 8)

How do I make sense of the suffering in my life? (Ch. 9)

How can I know God more intimately? (Ch. 10)

In the coming pages, I will regularly be drawing on three lines of argument. First, I want to back up everything I say with Scripture. The Bible is absolute bedrock for anything

and everything a truly born-again Christian believes about God and His dealings with us. Second, when necessary I will appeal to those amazing old schoolers of past centuries, like Moody, Murray, and Müller. When I was a young Christian, these powerhouses challenged many of my naïve assumptions about God and ministry. Third, every chapter will begin with the testimony of a friend of mine whose life was transformed by the lost key being discussed.

So why the last line of evidence, the personal touch, the testimony of some real-life person I know? Because it's my belief that good theology should make a powerful impact in the real world. It should have the power (Gk. *dunamis*) of God on it. Another way of saying this is that if our religion and theology don't actually work, they probably aren't true. I think this was basically what the apostle Paul was saying when he wrote:

The kingdom of God is not just about talk. It's about power. (1 Corinthians 4:20)

What follows is not just theory. Does it have good biblical support? Yes. Is it backed up by some of the biggest guns in Christian history? Yes. And does it work? Absolutely.