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HOW THEY ENTERED CANAAN
(A Collection of Holiness Experience Accounts)
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

LYLE POTTER
(Nazarene)

I like to preach about Elisha. I have a lot of things in common with Elisha. When he took that path and went down the road, determined to have all that God had for him, satisfying the deep longing of his heart, regardless of what it cost, I could see Lyle Potter who did exactly the same thing.

Yes, I had some training in one of our fine colleges. I spent some time in the business world. God put His hand on me and called me into the ministry. And I remember one day, after I had been preaching in the Church of the Nazarene, and a pastor for four years, I was praying that God would bring a revival to our church. Now this was a particular place I was pastoring. I was a young pastor, rather inexperienced, doing my best -- (God had helped me -- my second pastorate. I was proud with the way things seemed to be moving. But I said, "You know, if we can just have an old-fashioned Holy Ghost revival in this church, it will be the thing we need." And I got on my knees and began to pray. I was just bombarding the heavens and doing my best. The Lord was waiting for me to run out of breath, because He wanted to talk to me. But you know, I was doing all the talking. I ran out of breath and paused for just a minute and the Lord said, "Just a minute, son." He said, "Son, before I can bring an old-fashioned revival to this church I need to bring an old-fashioned revival to your heart." He said, "Son, you have been preaching now for several years, but you'll have to confess that many, many times you've had doubts and questions about whether or not my Holy Spirit has moved into your life. And son, I'd like to settle all those doubts and all those questions so you could be an effective witness for me."

"Oh, but," I said, "Lord, just a minute. You know Lord, I am willing to do everything you want me to do." And I said, "Lord, You know how many times I made a consecration, and how many times I prayed about this thing. And Lord, you know I went to so-and-so, and I went to a certain evangelist, and I went to a certain pastor, and I said, 'This is my situation, do you think I am all right?' "And I said, "Lord, you know they said I was perfectly all right." And I said, "You know Lord, when I'd preach a sermon on holiness and I'd get some people down to the altar, and I'd get down there to help them to get sanctified, that old question mark would come up again in my

soul--'Are you sure He has moved into your life?' And then, Lord, you know I'd go home and pray about half the night, and I'd be sure everything was on the altar, and I'd feel o.k. about it, and I'd say, 'Surely it's all right,' and you know I'd last till the next red hot holiness sermon would be preached and I'd be snowed under again."

The Lord said, "Son, I have something for you that's far better than that uncertain question about your relationship to Me, and I want you to settle it in this revival. And I want you to become a seeker." [OH, THE MULTITUDES THAT BACK OUT AT THIS POINT!]

"Oh, Lord," I said, "but, I'm the pastor here, Father." I said, "What in the world is going to happen when I confess that I haven't the experience that I ought to have?" And I said, "Lord, I just can't afford to do that. I can't afford for the sake of the church; I can't afford to do it." I said, "Lord, what's going to happen if I walk out and confess that I have a heart need, and I was not really settled in my experience?"

And that's it, friends; for sixteen years I had been saved, but I had never prayed through about the fact that the Holy Spirit had cleansed my heart. And I said, "Lord, if I confess now that I've never prayed through about this thing, it's going to ruin me." The Lord said, "Son, you're already ruined." I said, "Lord, it's beginning to look that way." I said, "Lord, if I confess I'm not where I ought to be next Sunday morning, they may tell me in my church they don't want me any more. And I wouldn't blame them." [OH, HOW THE "OLD MAN" HATES TO DIE!]

And I said, "Lord, there's Dr. Sanner; he's been my district superintendent for four years. And I said, "Lord, you know what I heard the other day? He told somebody that I was one of the outstanding young preachers on the district." (I liked to think about that you know!)

I said, "Lord, you know--what if he finds out that I'm not even settled in my own experience" I said, "Lord, he'll never give me another place to preach." I said, "Lord ... let me find some other way out of this thing. I'll never make it." The Lord said, "The only thing for you to do, son, is to take the pathway that Elisha took. Let those stay on the sidelines that want to, but you have a hunger in your heart that I want to fill. You've studied the theology of holiness, but you've never really, definitely, positively, unquestionably received it in your heart." And He said, "Son, this thing is real--the most real thing that can happen to you. I want to settle the doubts. I want to settle the question."

And you know, about that time I was down under the bench. When I started praying, I was beating it on top, but when the Lord got through talking to me, I was just crawling. I was way down there, I had to look up to find ground!

I said, "Lord, help me; I'm in an awful way. I wanted you to come and help my people out there, and you put your finger on me. What am I going to do?" The Lord said, "Son, there is only one thing for you to do. You have been preaching for these years that if God puts light on your pathway, you're going to have to walk in it or else begin to walk in darkness." I tell you I faced that thing that day.

I said, "Lord, I'll never preach another sermon." I said, "Lord, if I never get called to another church; if the name of Lyle Potter which is really known across our district and across several districts -- if that name drops out of circulation and is forgotten from here on out -- I'll settle this thing, if it's the last thing I do."

I know what it is to see my brethren in the ministry watch me as I walk out and confess a heart need. I thought it was going to kill me. And I confess to you, that within the next three days, I did die. But die was the thing I didn't want to do -- die out to myself, and die out to my ambitions, and die out to my plans, and let go. Those are the things that I didn't want to do; and I struggled with it and battled with it for sixteen long years. But from that moment I said, "Lord, I'll not touch another bite until this thing is settled in my life." And I quit eating. I drank a little buttermilk to keep up my strength, and for three days I prayed. What do you mean, did you pray all the time?" Oh, no, I slept at night; I had to, to keep praying in the daytime. And I went about my pastoral work, but whenever I got the opportunity, I went to the mountains to pray. I went into the bedroom to pray. I went to the church altar to pray. I went into the annex of the church there was a little junior class room) and in this little junior room I went to pray. I searched my heart. I said, "Oh, God, I want that Lyle Potter will cease to exist. I want you to come Lord and search me out and really get to the bottom until I know that my heart is clean and YOU have come to abide." I said, "Lord, I have started now and I'm not going to stop until I know."

You know, a lot of times I have made consecrations. A lot of times I'd done a lot of praying, and said, "I guess it's all right. I have gone as far as I can go." But you know the Lord said, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" And there was a receiving-- there was somehow a faith that reached out and received a confirmation I had never had. And as long as I never had it, I was drifting. I didn't know exactly where I was. When it came to a positive, definite assurance -- an assurance that I knew was mine -- I didn't know it.

I was crossing the college campus one day and I heard the young people over in the chapel singing. They were singing from their hearts, "I never shall forget when the fire fell, and the Lord sanctified me." I said to myself, "That's a wonderful song. There's a lot of feeling in it, but the only trouble with it is, it's too positive." I looked back in my experience and I said, "There hasn't been a time when the fire has fallen, but I still know I'm consecrated. I know I belong to God. And I don't believe there's such a thing as absolutely insisting that folk can have a positive, definite assurance that the Holy Spirit has come to abide."

You say, "How in the world could you figure out a theology like that?" I'll tell you where I got it. It was my experience. And it was the experience of a lot of others that I knew. And I said, "As long as a lot of others are in the same boat with me, it must be all right."

There was a song that goes: "It's real. Bless God, I know it's real." And you know, that song was a little too definite for me. I said, "I know you can know you are consecrated. You can know you are given over to God. But so far as a definite, positive, know-so, that He has accepted your consecration and the Holy Spirit has moved in," I said, "I wonder if that really is the thing that we can insist upon."

I had read books. I would always turn to the last chapter where it talks about the witness of the Spirit, and I saw that a lot of folk were confused, and I said, 'I'm not alone in the holiness movement, and I guess I'll just have to stay in this position.' [OH, THE TRAUMA, AS ONE FACES HIS EXECUTION!]

But God began to talk to me and I began to search my heart. I kept insisting: I said, "Lord, surely I don't have to go through life with an uncertainty about this experience in my own heart." And in the next three days -- you say, 'Brother Potter, why in the world did God let you pray three days?' Because I was so stubborn! You know, you don't have to pray one minute if you are willing to literally, unreservedly let the Lord have His way. But I had theology that needed to be reconstructed.

And you know, Bud Robinson said, "When we're seeking to be sanctified, the Lord turns on the fire and He just lets it boil. And as it boils, all the unclean things come to the top and the Lord skims them off." And Bud Robinson said that when he sought to be sanctified, the Lord turned on the fire, and He skimmed off the impurities. And in his inimitable way, he said, "I thought I was goin' to skimmins."

I'm telling you, friends, I thought for the next three days I was going to skimmings. I was amazed at how much self there was in my heart. I was amazed at the ambitions that I had that were outside the perfect will of God. I was amazed at how much Lyle Potter existed, and how little there was of the Holy Spirit. I said, "Oh, God, I want this to be the end of myself until YOU can literally take over."

It was on the third afternoon: I was over in the little chapel, at the junior altar, on one of the little junior benches, praying. It was a little bench. I was kneeling beside it. A junior bench is just about my size anyway. In back of me, there at the junior altar, Reuben Bridgwater, the evangelist who was with us in the meeting, was kneeling and praying. While I prayed I was telling God I wanted Him to cleanse my heart. I was confessing to Him, but there was that uncertainty and that question. And I said, "I want to get to the end of myself." As I prayed and prayed, Reuben Bridgwater behind me, began to sing. And in his rich Tenor voice -- I can hear it now -- "Oh, make me clean, Oh, make me clean. Mine eyes Thy holiness have seen. Oh, send that burning cleansing flame; and make me clean, in Jesus' name."

You know my friend, while he sang, I said, 'Oh God, that's the thing I want. That's the thing I'm reaching out after. That's the longing of my soul. I'm going to have it or die.' And as he sang, somehow I saw a promise. You know there are a lot of good promises in the Book. And the Lord said, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." I said, "Lord, I have been walking in the light for three days." I said, "Lord, I did exactly what Elisha did. I don't know anything else to do." The Lord said, "Son, there is a promise for you. You have done all you can do, and you've got to the end of yourself. Why don't you take hold of a promise and swing clear, and trust Me to sanctify you wholly?"² "Oh," I said, "God, I'm afraid to. What if it doesn't happen? What if I go on with these doubts?" He said, "Son, there's only one step you've got to take, now that you are at the end of yourself. Get your eyes off your consecration, look to Me in faith believing, take My Word in faith believing and I will sanctify you, and let you know that the work is done."

"Oh," I said, "Lord, I'm afraid to do it." He said, "You'd better do it, son it's the only way." And then, Reuben Bridgwater got down to the chorus. And he began to sing, "He makes me clean. He makes me clean. Mine eyes His holiness have seen." I said, "Lord, I'm going to grab your promise and swing clear." And do you know what I did? I took hold of a promise of God. I let go of everything in the world, and said, "Lord, I believe you now to cleanse my heart."

Oh! Glory to God! Something happened to me. I'll tell you what happened: I got to the end of Lyle Potter. You say, "Did you feel an electric shock?" I didn't feel a thing. "Oh," you say, "I thought there was a lot of feeling about this thing." Listen, friends, I didn't feel a thing. But I'll tell you one thing, I knew I had prayed to the end. If there was another prayer to pray, I wouldn't know how to form the words ... I got to the end of Lyle Potter and God had been trying to get me there for sixteen years. I held on to my reputation, and I held on to my position, and I just didn't dare to let go. God wanted to get me to the end. And there in that little junior chapel, on the third afternoon, I got to the end. I stood up. I reached out my hand, and I said, "Reuben, I believe He has come." No manifestation. No exterior feeling. I knew in my heart I had finally prayed to the end.

You say, "Did you shout?" No, my wife still does the shouting. You say, "Did you jump over one of those benches?" I don't want to brag, but I could have jumped three of them as easy as not, but I didn't jump a thing. I was just as calm that day as ever in my life. I had the assurance in my heart that what I had put off doing for sixteen years, I had finally done -- prayed through, and touched the hem of His garment. There came a Spirit into my life that day that I had never had before. And let me tell you, it is an assurance that has never left me. From that day to this I've gone through deep valleys. I've walked through the darkness when it was so black that I couldn't see where I was going. I've been down when it seemed that I didn't have a bit of religion at all. But I knew that I had made a consecration. I knew I had committed something into His hands that He was faithfully keeping for me. I have never doubted from that moment to this that God accepted my consecration and my heart was clean.

I ought to tell you that everything the devil told me would happen, didn't happen. And everything he told me wouldn't happen, did happen. From that day to this I've had more opportunities to witness for Him. I've had more pulpits open. There have been more seekers at the altar. From that day to this I date everything in my life back to what happened to me fifteen and a half years ago, when I finally prayed through.

Oh! I say tonight, God give us more Elishas. Aren't you sick and tired of those doubts and questions? Aren't you sick and tired of hearing messages on holiness and wishing in your heart that it was so? Listen, friends, we can pray through about everything else in the world -- let's pray through about that. And it won't take three days, and it won't take three hours, and it won't take three minutes if you are willing for God to have His way, and you prove to Him that you mean business from the depth of your soul. God wanted me to mean business.

Thus ends Lyle Potter's testimony which very clearly explains what we mean by taking the death-route" to the crucifixion of self and being sanctified "holy" and "wholly."

Source: "Scriptural Death-Route Holiness"

by Rev. L. S. Boardman

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