My Uncle Bill

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Hebrews 13:15)

My Uncle Bill was married to my mother's sister, Irene. They had no children, so the Lord privileged me to love them as my own mother and father.

My aunt Irene had been spiritually enlightened through my mother's death. She had never known that God lived **in** people until she experienced watching my mother die the glorious death that she did. Irene actually saw the glory of the Lord that radiated through my mother's sufferings. She said to me one day, "Sylvia, I don't see Nona lying there dying of cancer. I see Jesus lying there, turning suffering into glory." I knew that flesh and blood had not told her this glorious truth--it was pure revelation. From that day on, I talked to her as if she knew all the same spiritual truths that I knew. Funny thing, she always rose up to what I was saying. She didn't have the words, but her spirit leaped to my words.

Her one great pain in life was that her husband, Bill, didn't know the Lord. Uncle Bill lived his whole life professing to be an atheist. He was a racist and a bigot. He and my aunt battled most of their 55 years of marriage, although Irene loved him dearly. Then, about two years ago, we were sitting in my living room discussing his spiritual condition when the Lord gave me a word of faith.

The lights turned on as I said to Irene, “Let's pray for him through a word of faith. Let's believe that Bill is **not** an atheist! I don't care what he says with his mouth, we are going to believe that he is really a believer in his heart.” Then I went on to say to her that Jesus said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). Irene and I made a pact with God that day.

Two, maybe three months later, Bill was diagnosed with colon cancer. It originated in his gall bladder. Self-sufficiency, which thinks it can handle anything, cannot handle weakness. So he began to talk about God. This was just the beginning of a long battle with the Spirit as God prepared him to receive the forgiveness of his sins which is in Christ. During that time he took all his frustrations out on my aunt. She stood strong in faith, unwavering in her word of faith for him.

Years earlier, Irene had learned through her own battle with diabetes, that self-pity would be his real enemy. It is never what happens ‘**to us’** that is the problem; it is **‘what we do with it’** that is either the solution or the real problem. Irene learned that by accepting her disease and trusting God she could learn to live with it. But, if she had continued to feel sorry for herself, and fight it, instead of accepting it, she would have been buried by it. She knew the same would be true for Bill. So, she would never feel sorry for him or let him feel sorry for himself. She was tough, but I think that was the thing that pressed him into God, instead of self-pity.

All this was very hard on Irene, so she would comfort herself by going into the garden and feeding the birds. One of them became quite tame, helping her fill those dark days

with friendship and love. I call her St. Francis of Assisi. One day she was telling me how her bird watched for her and would come down and eat from her hand. As I listened, I asked her what kind of bird it was. When she told me it was a mockingbird, I roared with laughter and said: "Don't you know that he has a message to you from God,"

"What is He saying," she asked? "The mocking bird is the only bird I know of that sings at night! He is telling you to just keep singing praises to God, no matter how dark things get. Just keep singing." And that she did. Her faith soared during those two years of nursing Bill, as she just kept on praising God.

I had no real outer evidence Uncle Bill was responding to the Spirit's call. But faith, as we know, is its own evidence and doesn't need any outer signs.

The Spirit was generous to me with a surprise word. It came while I was visiting my father in the nursing home. He has Parkinson's disease, and his mental faculties are not always clear. I usually play along with him in his imaginations, although I always listen for a message from the Spirit. One day he said to me, "Bill came to visit me." "He did" I asked? "Yes, he told me that he loves you as much as he loves Jesus Christ!" This startled me, but it made me think. Later that day I opened my Bible and my eyes fell on a passage in the Gospels. Where Jesus was saying to his disciples, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, receiveth Him that sent me" (Matthew 10:40). I took it by faith that Uncle Bill was actually receiving Christ by receiving me.

Weak as Bill was, he came to my house on Thanksgiving as usual. As he was leaving, he looked at me and said, "I'm not going to make it much longer." I looked at him and said, “Is that all right with you Uncle Bill?” "Yes," he said, “whenever the good Lord wants me.” Then I asked, “Do you want me to come and talk to you about that?” “Yes I do,” he said.

The last two years were God's mercy, as the Spirit prepared him for eternity. God is forever loving and relentless with His pressures. He alone knows how to break a person down who is steeped in pride and self-sufficiency. The day that I went to talk with Uncle Bill, he confessed all his sins to me as I shared with him the power in the cleansing blood of Christ. What a privilege it is to bring our loved ones the Good News of the Gospel. Then a precious thing happened. He asked me to speak at his funeral. He said "I don't have a preacher you know--will you be my preacher?" It humbled me, and I said, "Of course I will." Our simple word of faith in the mighty saving arm of God was being manifested right before my eyes. Is anything or anyone too hard for God?

On Christmas Eve, Uncle Bill died early in the morning without ever having pain. Hallelujah!! Irene has been praising the Lord continuously. She has blessed everyone who knows her. “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place” (II Cor. 2:14).

The funeral was not until Monday morning. The night before, I still had not prepared anything for the service. In the middle of the night I woke up in a sweat and started trying to put some scriptures in order. The Spirit said to me,

“Go back to bed; it will come as easily as the events of any normal day.” I did, and fell sound asleep. About 7:00 A.M. I woke up and began thinking about seeds.

All the power of the universe is hidden in a tiny seed. When you hold a seed in your hand, you are looking at the promise of new life hidden under its hard shell. For when you look at an acorn, you are really seeing a full grown oak tree, bearing thousands of seeds of its own.

I began the funeral by telling them that God had promised the seed, which is Christ, and that seed would be planted in every man (Gen. 3:15 & John 1:9). God is the gardener, Christ is the seed, and we are the garden. The gardener is the one who prepares the soil (by the Holy Spirit) for the growth of the seed. Then the Holy Spirit, like the hound of heaven, is relentlessly preparing the garden. Everything that comes to us, good or evil, comes to us from the loving hand of our Father, who causes all things to work together for our good. Bill's cancer was the mercy of God's preparation for new life and that new life was Christ coming to birth in him.

Uncle Bill was a Christian for only two weeks before he died. Was his life a waste? Not in God's sight. Remember, God sees an oak tree. Matthew 20:1-16 tells a story about Jesus walking along with his disciples and saying that, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who rose early in the morning to go to the market place to find workers for his vineyard. He found workers and hired them for a penny, which was a day's wage. Later that day, at the third hour he decided he needed more workers. So he hired more laborers and told them he would give them whatever was right, and they agreed. He repeated the same thing the sixth hour, until

it was the eleventh hour. He found some in the market place standing idle, and asked them, “Why are you standing idle? Go work for me and I will pay you what is right.”

Now when the day's work was over, the workers came to him for their wages. The owner of the vineyard gave everyone the same wage, one penny for his work. The ones hired early in the day grumbled and said, “These men who were hired last worked only one hour. And you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.” But he answered them, “Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a penny? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” “So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

What is first and foremost in God's heart is the attitude of the man who knows that he does not deserve to get the full wage, but gets it anyway. That man truly knows God's grace, while the others are self-righteous and falsely think they deserve and need more. They are last in the kingdom of God.

Uncle Bill was an eleventh hour person who worked only one hour, yet received the same wage as us all. And what is the work that he did? Jesus said that the work of God is to simply believe in Him (John 6:29). What a God!

Uncle Bill's death is bearing much fruit as the promise said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone, but if it dies it will bring forth much fruit” (John 12:24). The one principle and promise of the universe is that life must come out of death. Life begins in death, for Jesus said in Matt. 16:24, “Unless you lose your life, you will

not find life." What we lose is a false, independent life that agrees with Satan, "I will be like the most High God." Just think of the pride of the creature that believes that in separation he has a will of his own, and strives to be like the Creator! In our deception, we don't realize that we are really a counterfeit like Satan. For no one can be like God. Only God can be God. The only way to be like God is to submit ourselves in a death to our satanic egos filled with pride, and humbly rest in the life of Christ in us and as us.

I will always remember the life of my precious Uncle Bill, for it represents all the lost people everywhere waiting for someone to believe the impossible for them. All the power of the universe is contained in a tiny seed, and that seed of Christ is in every man, waiting to be birthed. Let us all "laugh at impossibility and shout IT SHALL BE DONE!"

This was the faith cry declared by C.T. Studd as he made his way into the African jungles sharing Christ. His desire was to see "Jesus running around in black bodies." The fruit of his labor of faith still speaks today as a testimony to his believing in impossibilities. A mustard seed is a small thing, yet Jesus says that is all the faith we need. Can we dare to believe? For it is written: "All things are possible to them that believe"(Mark 9:23).

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