

Chapter 10

Testing the Waters, Phase 2

St. Louis, 1943-1949

My brother Cliff had already been drafted into the Signal Corps, with the Weather Department. He served on both the China side and the Burma side of the Himalayan Mountains. When he left the States he gave me his 1937 Model A Ford, and that proved to be a tremendous help, as I had to drive considerable distances to work. Ted meanwhile found himself serving in the Air Force.

When we were married Bernadine and I lived for a few months in an upstairs flat, while I continued to work for the joint venture headed by Mr. Mellis. When we finished the last of the thirty-eight homes and divided up the profits Bernadine and I bought one of the homes, a five-room brick bungalow with a full basement that contained a garage. On December 15 of that same year, 1942, the Lord gave us our first daughter, Margaret Frances. What a thrill! And we realized that the Lord had supplied the house at just the right time. Certainly He was still leading. And He provided a good job for me at Quick Meal, where I would learn much more about maintenance work. Things were indeed “looking up!”

But then, like a proverbial bolt out of the blue, we received a phone call from Watson Thornton. He asked us to come back to Tadmor and help him. To make the decision more difficult, he wanted our decision within that week, even though he would not expect us at Tadmor for a month or two.

Could it be that the Lord really wanted us to give up our home and move back to Tadmor? There we were in our comfortable new home, with a baby less than a month old. I thoroughly enjoyed my job at Quick Meal, though it did involve occasionally working on

Sundays for the first time in my life and also involved shift work. I worked the day shift for two weeks, then night for two weeks, and then graveyard for two weeks. But I liked the work and the people I worked with, and relished learning so many new things. My boss, Clarence Burton, had already let me know that he intended to break me in as a stationary engineer, a job that would ensure a good living the rest of my life. Both Bernadine and I felt very much at home in Hope Church, and were quite active there. Bernadine had lived in St. Louis all her life, and delighted in having many close relatives near by. I, too, had a number of relatives in and around the city, and was only now beginning to know some of them. Did it make sense to move back to Tadmor?

An obvious problem we would have to face was the salary. How would we make ends meet if we gave up the salary at Quick Meal? All Watson could promise us in addition to a roof over our heads, was \$30.00 per month, plus milk, cream and eggs. In addition we would receive half of a hog as part of our salary. And we had our baby to think of.

But there was this phone call from Watson, so similar to the call the Apostle Paul received in Troas so long ago, “Come over to Macedonia (*Tadmor?*) and help us!” *How unfeeling and inconsiderate of Watson even to think of calling on us now! Why, Lord, why?* We had to face the question, “Which is more important, our comfort or being in the Lord’s will?” All through the time of ankle-deep water, the Lord had indeed brought me through. Now, as the water became a little deeper, up to my knees, could I still trust the Lord to supply every need, and guide *us* – not *me*, for now I was a family man – even when the water seemed to be flowing in the wrong direction?

Reluctantly we promised to move down in the spring, after making the necessary arrangements. We invited Bernadine’s parents to move in to our house on Dawson Place

with the condition that they would make the payments. They still lived in that tiny, four-room upstairs flat on Cote Brilliante and it made us happy to see Tom and Margaret so delighted at the prospect of being able to move into the bigger home with the good-sized back yard, and place for a garden.

I have long since forgotten the details of the move, but we packed all our worldly possessions in a small moving van, drove the 115 miles to Tadmor, and moved into the “Green House,” the house Charlie Heuchan and I had built with oak lumber cut from trees on the farm. We had hauled the oak logs to the saw-mill, where it had been cut into boards according to our specifications. We hauled all that lumber back from the saw-mill in the fall of 1939. We should have used it at once, but we made the mistake of leaving it out in the weather all winter, and when we tackled the job in the spring of 1940 we found the oak so hard that we had to use beeswax to lubricate the nails. Everything in the construction was just as cheap as possible. But it was as *“solid as oak!”*

For three years the farm hand and his family had lived in the house, and the first thing we found as we moved in was that it had never been cleaned. Bernadine, on her hands and knees spent hours on the kitchen floor, using a trowel to scrape up grease and mouse droppings up to a quarter of an inch deep. I, too, was as busy as I could be trying to make the house livable. Rarely had we seen such filth, and I felt terribly guilty about moving my wife and tiny baby into this miserable mess. We painted the walls with bright colors and did all we could to convince ourselves we could have a happy home here.

A few years earlier when we built the house, Watson had the men dig a well by hand just a few feet from the house. At a depth of twenty-eight feet we found a bountiful stream of pure water flowing through a gravel bed. We lined the well with a good solid concrete wall. I could

hardly wait to install a pump and plumbing so we could at least have cold water running to the kitchen sink.

Not long after we moved in, Bernadine spotted a bedbug climbing up the bedroom wall. That day we painted all the walls with kerosene, the accepted method of eliminating the pests, and although Bernadine with her sharp eyes never let up on her inspection, we never found another bedbug. On those occasions when I visited in some of the local homes and came home in the evening, she insisted that I remove every stitch of clothing before I came into the house, and I couldn't blame her. I remember visiting in one of the "better" homes. The lady of the house had to chase a forty-pound pig off a chair so her guest could have a place to sit. In another home, one that was only a year old, the lady had twenty-four hens, and they laid twenty-three eggs every day. One would be under her bed, another behind a couch, another in a closet. They knew where to look for all the eggs. Another neighbor was quite offended when his wife objected to his coming home with two dead skunks, one in each pocket of his coat. Indeed, it would take scrupulous vigilance to protect our little Margie from the filthy living conditions of the folks around us.

On the other hand, these back country folks were as friendly as they could be, and demonstrated a high degree of skill in their lines of work. I marveled at Ralph Veach, a man who could not write his own name. When he swung an axe effortlessly, every blow counted. We made hundreds of fence-posts, from either red cedar or white oak. Ralph, with his six days' growth of chin foliage, would stand there with one foot on a six-foot length of timber, his hand-rolled cigarette dangling from his lips. As he talked he swung his axe easily, as sharp as any razor blade, and in just a few minutes his fence-post looked as though it had been sharpened in a giant pencil-sharpener.

During this time I led a Sunday service in Yeary, a small schoolhouse six miles from Tadmor. Sometimes I walked and sometimes I rode a little pinto mare owned by Delmar Faust who was then responsible for the farm work on the Tadmor farm. Since I had to open and close ten gates in those six miles, and because I had so little experience with horses, I found it almost as easy to walk as to ride. The pinto was very sensitive to any touch behind the saddle, and I remember once after dismounting to close a gate, she started moving before I was seated in the saddle. I landed behind the saddle with my full weight, and she took off with a jump. The reins broke, and I pulled her sharply to her left. Together we plowed into the fence. She fell, and I fell beside her. Neither of us suffered serious harm, and I thanked the Lord for His protection. The Lord taught me a great lesson on faithfulness through the Yeary experience. Regardless of rain or snow, I knew those folks would be looking for me, and I dared not disappoint them.

Because of World War II and the shortages it produced, we had to move back to St. Louis. Bernadine's mother and father were living in our home on Dawson Place, and in the fall of 1944 Pastor Thornton's daughter, Elizabeth Warner, invited us to rent a house she owned at 5054 Terry Avenue. We were glad to take her up on the invitation. There on the corner, the two-story, white frame house stood almost buried under bushes that had grown up untended over the years. In the spacious back yard on the south side of the house, two large sycamore trees provided ample shade, while a circular patch of lily-of-the-valley provided a touch of beauty. A week or two of hard work enabled us to clear the brush from the west side of the house and burn it in the ash-pit in the alley.

After a while, we bought the house from Elizabeth Warner. We lived in the four downstairs rooms and rented two of the four upstairs rooms to Cliff and Wanda and their three-

year-old daughter Barbara. Another room we rented to Bernadine's Aunt Fannie, while Mrs. Gray, an elderly widow, occupied the front room at the head of the stairs.

Those years, 1944 to 1949, on Terry Avenue were filled with excitement. Bernadine gave birth to Ruth Ann, and it seems we were constantly busy with one project or another. When we moved in, the basement was so low that we could not stand upright. The furnace had been installed in a pit a foot or two deeper than the floor. We dug out the rest of the basement and added concrete to support the foundation.

I worked for a year or two for Standley & Co., and while the war continued in the Pacific, we shipped lathes and other tools and war materiel to our forces as they progressed from island to island. These items had to be packed in such a way that they could be thrown overboard by the ships in high tide and left under water till low tide when tractors could pick them up. When World War II ended, the company began developing milk coolers.

After leaving Standley & Co., I went to work for American Thermometer. While I worked in the maintenance department there, my boss who went by the unlikely name of Sylvester Howie, put me on carpentry work for the first three months, then plumbing for three months, and finally electrical work for another three months. This experience proved to be a tremendous asset when I found myself several years later involved in remodeling a church building in Oklahoma. In each place I worked, the Lord had lessons for me to learn, lessons that would be of real help in days to come.

At American Thermometer, I found abundant opportunity to talk to others about the Lord. One day an elderly man with whom I found myself working quite frequently looked at me and said, "Paul, you'll never be happy till you are pastoring a church." Neither he nor I understood that God was even then preparing me for future work as a pastor.

When I had worked a year and a half at American Thermometer I was asked to serve as a shop steward. Immediately after I took on the responsibility the workers decided to go on strike, and I disliked the idea so strongly that I quit my job, a move that now seems to have been more cowardly than wise. But the Lord supplied one job after another.

Among other jobs I spent several months as one of three hundred men working for a construction company that built 360 houses in a year. I found myself working with one man in particular, Jewel Ragland, for several months. He was an excellent carpenter, and he willingly shared his technical knowledge with me. One day as I was driving a 16-penny spike into a two-by-four, I hit my thumb hard. The skin burst open and bled profusely. A week later he said to me, "Paul, I saw when you busted your thumb. If that had happened to anyone else on this whole job, he would have painted the sky blue with his cussing." Shortly after that I visited him in his home and talked with him and his wife about the way of salvation. I was thrilled when his wife Georgia accepted the Lord about one o'clock in the morning. I could not help being thankful for smashing my thumb a few weeks earlier! It would be more than a year later before Jewel came to the Lord.

One day someone invited me to speak at Gardenville Community Church, a tiny church at the extreme south end of St. Louis. Yes! This was exactly what I had been looking forward to all these years. When I finished speaking that Sunday, they invited me back for the following Sunday. I was delighted, and the third Sunday they asked me to serve as their pastor. Again I was more than pleased.

Shortly after this, Emil Elbe who served in the St. Louis Hebrew Mission, a good friend of ours and a pastor for many years, came to visit us. "Paul," he said, "if you are convinced the Lord wants you to preach, why don't you apply for ordination?" In just a few weeks, Dr.

Langmade and other pastors from the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA) came to Gardenville, and I was officially ordained. Little did I realize the joy I would have over the years from becoming an ordained minister in the IFCA.

To support myself while beginning to serve as a pastor, I tried various jobs. For a while I tried to sell hearing aids, but I was not thrilled with the job. If I succeeded in selling anything, it seemed that my boss paid me a minimum salary. Then when I failed to sell a hearing aid I found myself “on commission.” To say “things were tight” would be an understatement. Ruth Ann had to have surgery on her eye, and both girls came down with measles.

One day while I sat in the hearing aid office with my boss, the phone rang, and Bernadine said, “Paul, the house is on fire!” Jumping into our ’37 Model A Ford, I drove as fast as I could, running stop signs and breaking traffic laws. I had very poor brakes, and when I stopped in front of our house I did so by running into the curb. A furnace control in the basement had malfunctioned and had thrown sparks on the clothes drying there. Wanda, Bernadine’s sister who lived upstairs, came down and told Bernadine she smelled smoke. When Bernadine opened the basement door, the smoke poured out. Wanda called the fire department while Bernadine helped Barbara and Mrs. Gray from their upstairs rooms, and then called me. Margie and Ruth Ann were both down with measles but had to leave their room at once. By the time I arrived on the scene, although the fire in the basement had been extinguished, pandemonium still reigned, but by then the fire engine was about ready to leave. A policeman walked in and said to Bernadine, “Who is the driver of that car on the curb?”

“My husband,” she answered.

“I should arrest him. He could get someone killed!”

“I called him at work and told him our house was on fire. What would you expect him to do, take a street-car?” And she burst into tears.

What an afternoon! We had already planned to go out that evening to a church affair, and Bernadine went downstairs for some underwear for me, but came up at once, in tears, “Paul, all the underwear is burned up!” After a while we decided it would be good for us to get ourselves cleaned up, so she went to the basement again, and came back in tears, “The towels are all burned up!” And so it continued till we went to bed that night.

When we bought the house we thought it belonged to us. How naive! We quickly found out that the bank was the real owner and we were mere tenants with little to say about the property! Their representative came in and told us all we had to do and by what time it must be accomplished.

Shortly after that episode, I left the hearing aid job and worked at various small jobs, repairing a porch railing here and installing a washbasin in a bathroom there and any other work I could find.

I had nearly forgotten about Tadmor. Years ago, when Mr. Wurdack bought the farm and gave it to Hope Church, he had inserted a clause in the deed that demanded that the property be used for religious purposes. It could not be sold for use merely as a profit-making farm. Because of World War II, there was a period of time when not much was going on there, but then the Young Men’s Class at Hope Church accepted the responsibility of operating the camps there. Early in 1949 they asked us if we would accept the task of operating the camps that summer. They asked Bernadine to take charge of the kitchen and asked me to serve as the Camp Director.

Both of us were thoroughly excited. I thought back to the way the Lord had been leading all through my life. The “ankle-deep water” of China days was long forgotten. The “knee-deep

water” of Prairie Bible Institute and early training at Tadmor had led to “waist-deep water” as I struggled through various phases of training, and accepted the pastorate at Gardenville; and now I was excited about our “swimming out into the deeper water” and being involved in “full-time service” for the Lord for the rest of our lives.

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