

Chapter 18

Carlsbad Bible Church, 1978 – 1984

Those first few days following my ignominious expulsion as the Pastor of Woodstock Bible Church were undoubtedly the most difficult days of our lives. At the same time, we realized that indeed *“God brought us through”* this traumatic experience. Our consciences were clear. We knew we had indeed received an injustice, and there was nothing we could have done to avoid the treatment we received, without compromising the clear guidance of our Lord. At the same time, we quickly gained a new appreciation for the loyalty of the few friends who stuck with us and helped us move all our books and other possessions from the church to our apartment in Crystal Lake.

Sunday, January 8, 1978. The temperature, as I remember it, was fifteen degrees below zero, and if a thermometer could have measured my morale, it would have been considerably lower. Both of us wanted to go where no one would recognize us. So we went to Moody Memorial Church in downtown Chicago. Erwin Lutzer presented a fine message, but we found it difficult to absorb anything. After looking at the ice-covered Lake Michigan and spending an hour or more at the Adler Planetarium, we went back to spend the rest of the afternoon with our companions in misery, Bill and Ruth Ann. In the evening we visited the Evangelical Free Church, where, in spite of the superb music, I could not control the tears flowing down my face.

The next day, at the home office of the IFCA, Bryan Jones told me about two possible openings, one in Flagstaff, Arizona, and the other in Carlsbad, New Mexico. This meant more careful praying as we asked God for His clear guidance. Graciously, Pastor Dick Wright invited me to speak at Wonder Lake the following Sunday night, and I found real delight in speaking to a sympathetic audience.

Meanwhile as we thought about moving to New Mexico, we hated the idea of being so far from Bill and Ruth Ann and the two boys, Wes and Steve with their noisy laughter. And almost a whole continent would separate us from the Feaster family in western New York. To make matters worse, Bernadine hated to think of giving up her work in the New Life Bookstore. *New Mexico!* Who would want to move from the beautiful country of northern Illinois with its fragrant flowers to live in the hot, dry desert?

We drove to Carlsbad at the beginning of February to look over the situation. As we approached Carlsbad, the wide-open spaces seemed terribly empty and the black desert landscape a lifeless void. While we had driven through the State on Old Highway 66 once or twice, we were not prepared for the vast distances where we could see not even a hint or sign of human habitation. Our first morning in Carlsbad, the temperature was twenty-seven degrees, but by mid-afternoon, it was a perfectly beautiful day with the thermometer standing at sixty-seven degrees. Thinking of the ten-foot snow-banks that lined the highway as we left Crystal Lake, we had to admit we enjoyed this weather.

Officially Carlsbad Bible Church had closed her doors. A group of eight ladies met there on Sunday mornings, it seems, just because they could not stand the idea of giving up. We made contact with a number of the folks and saw the dire need for a strong Bible Church. That Sunday morning we met with a delightful group of eighteen, and enjoyed the fellowship.

As we left Carlsbad that afternoon we met several moving trucks on the highway, and Bernadine took pleasure in pretending to warn them. "Go back! You don't want to come down here into this desert!" she shouted into the windshield. Stopping at Hillsdale, Oklahoma, we enjoyed visiting with old friends who prayed steadily for us. Then on to St. Joseph, Missouri, where we attended the funeral of a dear friend, and visited with many of the Maranatha folks.

They gave me the pleasure of speaking to them on the Lord's Day. Leaving the church we stopped at Frosty and Edna Rutherford's home where, after feeding us, they loaded us down with food, both frozen and canned. All the way home we drove through a wild snowstorm, as every piece of snow-removal equipment in the country worked furiously to keep the roads open. We couldn't help thinking of the warm Carlsbad weather.

Now we had to make a decision. Would we go to Carlsbad, or look for something that would be more appealing? Just to complicate matters, it seemed, an invitation came suggesting that we consider a church in Key West, Florida. The idea seemed exciting after seeing the desert of southern New Mexico. Finally on March 9, Bernadine and I went together to Westchester and talked with Bryan Jones once again, and this time we tentatively committed ourselves to go to Carlsbad. As I looked to the Lord for affirmation, it seemed that the passages I read from the Bible included thoughts that could easily be understood as either for or against my decision. It was as though the Lord said, "I already led you to a decision once; now why do you not simply go forward, trusting Me!" At that point Dan Williams called from Carlsbad, saying he had secured an apartment for us. This helped us finally make up our minds. We made a quick visit to Lyndonville, New York, to see the Feaster family one more time before moving another thousand miles further from them.

We sent out 126 letters letting our friends know about our move. Since some had asked us about our support, we mentioned briefly that the IFCA home office would forward gifts marked "*For Carlsbad Project.*" At the time we had no idea how our financial needs would be met. We knew that if God sent us He would supply. April 2, our last Sunday in Crystal Lake, we attended both morning and evening services in the Evangelical Free Church, fully aware that we would miss their fine music.

On Friday, April 7, we left Illinois. The truck, carrying other furniture beside ours, would make two stops in Colorado before arriving in Carlsbad, so we had an opportunity to take the time to visit Hope Church, our home church in St. Louis. Driving southwest we stopped in St. Clair where we drove out into the Ozarks to visit Bernadine's mother for a brief, but delightful visit. Then we stopped briefly at Tadmor, and made an overnight stop in Hillsdale. These visits were pure delight as we renewed fellowship with friends from past years. The folks at Hillsdale overwhelmed us with their kindness and generosity. They invited me to speak at a specially called meeting on Tuesday evening, and gave us \$1,700.00 towards the expenses of restarting Carlsbad Bible Church. We arrived in Carlsbad the evening of Wednesday, April 12, and the next morning unloaded the Allied Van Lines truck at the apartment that Dan Williams had secured for us in the Rio Pecos complex.

At once we began the process of meeting the people who would become close friends during the next years. The Lord blessed in letting us see one young lady come to Christ the very first Sunday. We soon discovered that the membership in Carlsbad Bible Church had never exceeded thirty-nine members, and the reasons became apparent quite quickly. First of all, the church had been built on a very quiet side street and suffered from a serious lack of visibility. It was not easy to find, very few cars drove past the building, and almost no one saw the building accidentally.

A second problem had really torn the church apart as some folks infiltrated with false teaching concerning "Grace."

A third problem soon showed up. The founding pastor and his wife were so determined not to let the world take control of the church that hosting any sort of a meal was nearly impossible. The "fellowship" aspect of the church suffered severely. The only way to fill a

coffee-pot was to take the pot outside and fill it up from the outside hose faucet. While the first two problems were difficult to contend with, we met this third problem quite easily by having frequent get-togethers both in the fair-sized Sunday School room, as well as in the homes of the various people who attended the church. Later we built a fine kitchen to help with the need of fellowship.

We had to think carefully about the foundational reasons for the Church as presented in God's Word.

1. Concerning ***the goal*** of the church, our Lord has called *every believer* to go into the world and proclaim the Gospel to the lost (*Matthew 28:18-20*).
2. ***The method*** by which the church should accomplish this goal: the disciples met with the early believers, who *continued steadfastly in:*
 - (A) ***the apostles' doctrine*** (or teaching) and
 - (B) ***fellowship***, (the camaraderie of a team working smoothly together),
 - (C) ***breaking of bread*** (both eating together, and also worshiping as they observed the Lord's Supper) and
 - (D) ***prayers*** without which nothing can be accomplished (*Acts 2:42*).
3. The Lord supplies the personnel to keep the church functioning, to teach and bring believers to maturity (*Ephesians 4:11-16*).

Through the years 1978, '79 and '80 the Lord blessed us with several fine young couples. who came to know and love each other and work together. We experienced the joy of "doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer." We saw people come to the Lord, and we experienced real joy as we visited and witnessed to the lost around us. But it quickly became obvious that starting a Bible Church in Carlsbad would not be easy. One month we marked out an area of five hundred homes, and once each week we knocked on every door, invited the folks to visit our church, and left a tract and a small gift item in each home. All with no visible results. Inside our little group we experienced the joy of the Lord, but the church simply did not grow.

In October, 1980, we received word that our Rio Pecos Apartments would soon become condominiums. Under the new system, our rent would double. We received our notice on Thursday, October 16, and immediately saw we would have to move. We knew that housing was very scarce at that time and asked the Lord to lead us. Three days later on October 19, we received a phone call from Fredith, a good friend in Hillsdale, Oklahoma. She told us the Lord was leading her to send us \$2,000.00 to meet a special need. There was no way she could have known about our need. Exactly a week later Rich and Lois called from Hillsdale, and asked us about our housing problems. They promised \$2,000.00 towards our house expenses. We started looking, and the second house we looked at, 1011 North Thomas, only four blocks from the church, had a large living room, and a back yard large enough for any group of young people we would likely wish to entertain.

It was about this time that Cliff and Wanda called us from Crystal Lake, where they were visiting Bill and Ruth Ann. They took Mother to live with the Daughaday family. Wanda told how Mother was “on cloud nine” at the thought of living with her grand-daughter. Bill and Ruth Ann had remodeled their garage into a lovely apartment for her. Ruth Ann’s son Steve insisted that they fasten a ribbon across the doorway, and Mother had to “cut the ribbon” before entering. In some ways those last nine years were the happiest years of her life.

When we told Cliff and Wanda that we were buying a house for \$30,000.00, they were incredulous. “You can’t buy anything in California for that kind of money except a chicken-coop!” They came to visit us and helped in moving some of our things into the new house, amazed that we could find such a house for such a low cost.

Interest rates at the time were astronomical, over 15 per cent, but the Lord arranged for us to receive the last special “low interest loan” available in Carlsbad, as the bank loaned us

\$30,000.00 at 11.5 per cent. Once again I thanked the Lord for the years I spent in St. Louis before He opened the door for me to serve Him as a pastor. Now I had to draw on that maintenance experience in carpentry, plumbing and electrical work, as I spent as much time as possible in the next three weeks, putting the house into condition fit for us to move in.

We slept in our new home for the first time, on December 29, 1980. I was already 62 years old, and when the lady at the bank told us the final payment would be due in 2011 AD, Bernadine laughed aloud and quipped, "Good Luck!" But the Lord supplied abundantly and enabled us to make the last payment in 1994.

One big change came gradually that year and the next. While I served as the pastor of the Carlsbad Bible Church, I was invited to work part time with the Southwest Bible Church Mission, in planting churches around New Mexico. Bernadine and I spent considerable time and effort getting a Bible Class started in Roswell. We had about twenty folks meeting quite regularly, and then the Mission invited a young couple to lead that group into becoming a Bible Church. Later we spent more time in Hobbs, New Mexico, some 70 miles to the east of Carlsbad. I began to look forward to the day when I could turn over the pastorate in Carlsbad, and give my full time to starting new churches. Little did I know in 1980 where this would take me.

The year 1981 was filled with many good gifts, starting with life in our new home. In the spring we enjoyed a special gift of a week-long trip to San Jose, California, to be with Wanda and Cliff, Bernadine's sister and my brother. This was our first visit in their home in many years. From there we drove to Carmichael, CA, for a time of refreshment at the IFCA National Convention, where we renewed fellowship with many friends. Then in the fall we enjoyed another gift, a trip to Hillsdale, OK, to visit the church we served for nine years in the '50s and '60s. Then another gift enabled us to spend Christmas with our family in Crystal Lake, IL.

Coming to the end of 1983, we had no thrilling success stories to relate. Four lovely young families in the Bible Church had to move out of New Mexico within a few months of each other, and in spite of our best efforts, we were unable to replace them. These four families with one or two other families were the very core of the church. What a loss! I wrote in a letter as the year came to a close, "God has not promised skies always blue." Rather He offers a cross. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me! *Matthew 16:24*)" We have learned something of what Amy Carmichael meant when she wrote:

Captain beloved, battle wounds were Thine;
Let me not wonder if some hurt be mine.
Rather, O Lord, let my deep wonder be
That I may share a battle-wound with Thee!

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