

The Story of Hollybush Christian Fellowship

It was the summer of 1966. For many weeks George Breckon had been coming to our Friday night meetings and from the start he had been a great help, drawing on his vast Bible knowledge and deep understanding of the Scriptures to teach and build up the many young Christians who were now meeting regularly with us. But now and then he would slip in certain things that I would be unhappy about. Certain things that weren't... well, they weren't Wesleyan. At first I thought it best to ignore these little asides in the hope that nothing would come of them, rather than take issue with the man and blow the remarks out of proportion. That would only draw attention to what I saw as dubious doctrines. Best to say nowt and let them pass.

But George wasn't letting anything pass; he was just getting warmed up. It came to a head one Friday tea-time. We'd invited George and Gladys for a meal prior to the evening's meeting and I could tell from the moment I opened the door that George was excited about something. It wasn't the first time I'd seen him like this - bright-eyed and beaming - but I'd never actually got around to asking him about it, perhaps because I was afraid of what the answer might be. But this time the words just slipped out - and I could have kicked myself.

'Jim! Cynthia! I've just got to tell you - there's something more!'

It was too late to back out now. 'More than what?'

'More than what you've got. It's the Spirit. You need to be baptised in the Spirit. There's just so much more!'

My hackles spiked up. I'd known it was coming - for months I'd known it was coming - but still it grated. Maybe I could laugh it off.

'You've got the wrong man, George. I don't need any new experience; I'm quite happy as I am, thank you. The only experience I'm interested in right now is Cynthia's chicken casserole. Come on in, it's all ready.'

But George wouldn't be stopped. You can be filled with the Spirit, Jim! You can know power in your life and in your preaching enter into a new dimension of faith. And all you have to do is ask. Do it, Jim, do it - you'll get blessed more than you ever I thought possible.'

Instinctively I reached out for the stock answers. I don't believe in all that stuff I countered as we settled round the table. The baptism in the Spirit isn't for today; it was a once-and-for-all experience at Pentecost - to get the Christian Church off the ground.'

'But look at me,' beamed George. 'It happened to me and it changed my life.' I received the Holy Spirit when I was born again,' I protested. 'It was part of the package. There isn't anything more - you're just fooling yourself, George.'

He gulped a mouthful of casserole. I know we receive the Spirit when we're born again, but that's just the beginning. There's a glorious infilling, too, and you need that before the gifts of the Spirit can be released in your life.'

'But we've seen miracles,' Cynthia piped up. 'We know all about the work of the Holy Ghost.'

'Aye, we've prayed for people and they've been healed,' I said. 'That's power.'

'But that power came direct from God,' argued George. 'He wants you to receive power for yourself, so that you can use it in your own life, too. The Scripture promises it: Ye shall receive power!' Acts 2.

And I've preached on it. But that was just for the Early Church, George. The gifts petered out with Peter.' The casserole disappeared and in came the strawberry shortcake. But it wasn't about to sweeten me up. In fact as the discussion bounced back and forth across the table I found myself becoming more and more irritated. Whatever I said George seemed to have an answer for it and in the end I began clawing for an escape in the muck of personal remarks.

First: 'You're more emotional than I am, George. Maybe you needed some sort of experience to keep you going. Me, I've got my feet firmly on the ground.'

Then: 'Let's face it, George, you were in a bad way when God picked you up. He had to do something pretty dramatic else you were a gonner.'

And inevitably: 'I don't need your Pentecostal ideas. I'm a Methodist and always have been. My father's faith has always been good enough for me before and I don't see any reason to add to it now.'

The meeting that evening did not go well - at least, not for me. Our confrontation - for it seemed that was what it was - had left a bad taste in my mouth, not least because I'd been driven to realise I had no real answers to George's enthusiasm - only prejudices. And though I wouldn't have admitted it then, he had stirred up an ugly part of me that nearly 20 years of walking with the Lord had failed to touch. Pride. It was an old enemy and perhaps my biggest, but because of its very nature I would never own up to its presence in my life. And by denying it I allowed it free rein.

That night as Cynthia and I climbed into bed I was still smarting from George's blundering approach. Why had he brought this up now? From a comment in one of the meetings I knew that it had been three years since he'd received his so-called 'baptism in the Spirit', so why try foisting it upon us now? I'd known his views for months, just as he must have known mine. I'd thought, foolishly, that we had an understanding. Certainly I was happy to work with George in evangelism so long as he kept his peculiar ideas about the Holy Spirit to himself. But now... well, now he'd rocked the boat.

To add insult to injury that night Cynthia would not agree with me when I complained that George had ruined our meal together. To my horror I discovered that she was not at all convinced that George had got this business of the Holy Spirit quite wrong.

'Maybe there is something in what he says,' she suggested, snuggling down between the sheets. 'I doubt it,' I snorted as I fumbled in my bedside cabinet for the indigestion tablets. 'Take it from me, Cynthia, he's on a loser there. You wait and see.'

She turned towards me, her eyes wide open again, and her words were like a spear to my heart. 'But what about Rev'd Ransome up at Snape? You remember you once told me about him and how he'd got this baptism thing when he was out in Africa. They can't both be wrong, him and George - can they?' She'd hit a tender spot and I had to cover it fast. 'It was spending all that time in the sun did that to him,' I spluttered. 'There's nothing in it, not really. Shall I turn this light out?'

But Cynthia did not look ready for sleep. Suddenly fully awake, she propped herself up on her elbows and looked squarely at me.

'But if it is of the Lord - if there is something more ...'

'Then the Lord'll give it to us,' I said, irritably. 'We won't have to go asking and fussing about it; He'll just give it to us.'

She fell back against the pillow and lay staring up at the ceiling, lost in her thoughts. I switched out the light and settled down to sleep, certain I'd escaped. But then Cynthia spoke again.

'D'you remember that prayer we prayed when we first came here, love?'

'What about it?'

'I've never forgotten it,' she murmured. 'We said that we wanted whatever the Lord had in store for us - that we'd welcome everything He wanted to give us.'

In the darkness she couldn't see my anger.

Last stand

Summer mellowed into autumn, autumn shivered into winter... but George Breckon would not go away. As regularly and irritatingly as the migraines which continued to plague me, the man persisted in turning up for our Friday evening meetings and barely a week passed without him hounding us with talk about 'the baptism'. It was annoying. I liked George, but he was making life difficult for me.

His persistence was irking me, robbing me of my joy, pushing my normally endless patience to the limit. Why wouldn't he give up? Take 'no' for an answer? Go and peddle his Pentecostal ideas elsewhere?

It would have been easier, of course, if others in the Friday group had found him overbearing - but no one did. They all loved him and apparently couldn't hear enough about his Spirit-baptised experiences. It was just me - and as host of the house meetings, as well as one of the longest-standing Christians in the group, I had to love him too. It was not easy.

Eventually I developed a defensive mechanism. When George came to tea (Cynthia would insist on inviting him) I brushed aside every reference to Pentecost or the gifts of the Spirit with either a little joke or a cutting wise-crack, depending on the degree of threat it posed. I was sure that if I laughed it off long enough George would lose heart and give me up as an impossible case. He didn't.

I tried another tack. Monopolise the conversation. Talk about anything and everything - the new family at church, the price of breeding pigs, Joanna's latest antics - any subject to keep George off his hobbyhorse. But occasionally I'd have to stop for a mouthful of food and before I could swallow George would leap in with, 'Well, have you thought any more about...'

Where would it all end? I think from the very beginning George had never doubted where it would end... and Cynthia was giving him every encouragement to believe he was going to see his goal achieved. It was very unsettling. While I was pulling further and further away from the likelihood of ever pursuing the tilings George spoke of, Cynthia was clearly edging nearer.

From her early 'If there *is* something more ...' she had now moved on to 'If God's in it, I want it.'

But how could it be of God, I reasoned, if it was driving us apart? (I didn't realise it then, but that's one of the devil's favourite lines.)

On the surface of our relationship everything was fine - well, more or less, as long as I could pretend not to be rattled by George - but underneath I was seething. I was the spiritual head of our home - Cynthia ought to be taking her lead from *me*. (All my arguments were sound - until they were examined closely. Then they were identified for what they were: cleverly disguised pride.)

Occasionally these mental volcanoes would erupt and I would try to convince Cynthia that she was wrong; that she should close her mind to George's crazy ideas. But I should have known better. From the moment Cynthia had welcomed Christ into her life 12 years earlier she had pursued the things of God with a zeal that put even my enthusiasm in the shade. She had always meant business with the Lord - and there was no stopping her now. If the baptism in the Spirit was for real and it would enable her to receive more of God then Cynthia was going for it with arms wide open. Hers was an uncomplicated faith - and perhaps even naive, I thought - but it always seemed to bring results. It was no different this time.

It happened the following spring at Valley Road Baptist Church, Northallerton. George was holding a week's mission there, taking a different theme each night. One evening it would be 'The Blood of Jesus', another 'The Christian Life', and so on. The last night, I discovered, he was to preach on 'The Baptism in the Holy Spirit'.

'You'll not get me along to that,' I told Cynthia. I have enough of that man trying to indoctrinate me here in my own home without hearing it from the pulpit.'

'But you don't mind if I go, Jim?'

'For all the good it'll do you ...'

Cynthia said no more about it and that night I stayed home to baby-sit while a friend drove her into town.

Three hours later she was driven back again... though she might just as easily have flown. She was still walking on air when she came into the lounge. Never in my life had I seen someone so elated.

I got it, Jim!' she said unnecessarily. I got it!'

I'd been dreading this all evening and was ready with my reply. 'Never mind, Cynthia, it'll soon wear off.'

It was hurtful, I know, but in fact she never even heard me. Or if she did the words just bounced off. With a sudden laugh she did a little twirl there on the carpet, then turned and floated out of the room.

When at last she came down to earth a few days later I learned that at the close of the meeting George had invited all who wished to receive the baptism of the Spirit to go forward for prayer. Cynthia had almost leapt out of her chair and had been one of the first to the front of the church. There, two or three Christians had laid hands on her and prayed over her, some in 'tongues' - those strange babbling sounds the Pentecostals called a prayer language - and before she knew what had happened she felt power flowing through her whole body, along with an overwhelming joy. Moments later she too was 'speaking in tongues'.

I was not pleased. George's persistence, with Cynthia at least, had paid off and she had now experienced the phenomenon I had been fighting to save her from. The chances were he would now step up his pressure on me and so I would need a new line of defence. It was the one I'd been saving for just such an eventuality.

'Of course I don't doubt that something's happened to Cynthia,' I told George the following Friday, 'but that doesn't mean to say it's of the Lord. The devil can counterfeit the works of God, y'know. And as for this speaking in tongues lark, that's just a lot of mumbo-jumbo. It's all of the devil, the lot of it.'

Evidently George had heard that argument before. Unruffled, he smiled and said, 'Well, let's wait and see.'

At first I wondered what he had meant, but as the days and weeks passed by I began to understand. Cynthia was changing, but in no way that I could attribute to the enemy. She seemed to be getting so much more out of her Bible reading each day... she was spending far longer in prayer every morning and thoroughly enjoying it... she was more joyful in herself and more loving inward other people (including me!)... and she seemed to have so much more faith to exercise each day in matters both large and small.

That didn't sound like the work of the devil to me. In fact it sounded very much like the type of Christian life I had been exhorting people to live in numerous sermons down the years. And, ironically, I now realised I hadn't been living that kind of power-packed life, either.

But wait a minute ... what was I saying? The thought had come so fast I'd been unable to check myself. Power-packed? Was that really how I had summed up Cynthia's new lifestyle? I hated to admit it, but yes, there was a new dynamic in her life.

And then, to my annoyance, I remembered that verse from the book of Acts: 'Ye shall receive power.' That was the promise George had made so much of over the months. And now I saw that promise fulfilled in my own wife. It was maddening. I wanted so much to be able to dismiss this baptism business as heresy - or at the least a bubble that would soon burst - but my years of experience as a Christian wouldn't let me. When I allowed myself to be totally honest I had to admit that Cynthia had been blessed, and tremendously at that. Regardless of my own opinion of how she had come into this blessing, the truth was that she was going on with God.

But worse than that for me was the equal truth that I was being left behind. This was what hurt the most. This was what left me smarting. And this was what began to eat away at me as I tried to get to sleep at night. I would lie there, tossing and turning and thinking how unfair it was. Why should she get blessed? Look at her lying there, sleeping like a baby. Even in her sleep she's getting blessed. It's all wrong.

At the same time I had no intention of following her into that blessing. George could coax and push and even pray all he wanted - he wouldn't find me chasing after his Pentecostal experiences. As the months dragged by it seemed to me this was my best line of defence. Denominationalism. I knew I couldn't prove a case against the baptism from Scripture (I'd tried that one but every anti argument had gaping holes in it), and it was no use trying to dismiss it as a now-you-see-it-now-you-don't illusion; Cynthia's deepening experience of Christ knocked that one for six.

No, I would have to take my stand on the time-tested argument of tradition. I was a good Wesleyan. Why, I was now Superintendent of the Sunday school (with 100% attendance from the village children, no less).

I was a respected Methodist lay preacher. Youth leader. Church steward. Circuit steward. A member of half a dozen Methodist committees. In fact I'd been a Methodist longer than I'd been a Christian. It was inconceivable, that I should change now, and a good Methodist would never embrace the doctrines of another denomination.

That was it, I would stand on the rock of my Methodism. A sound rock it was too, for it had given me everything I'd ever needed. My Bible, a belief in prayer, and ultimately an introduction in Jesus Christ Himself.

But then a strange thing happened. One afternoon I was out in the yard tinkering with a misbehaving tractor and thinking through my argument for the nth time when I remembered the question that had come to me all those years ago - the question that had brought the challenge to my heart: *Do you really know me!*

Yes, thank God, I could truly say that I now knew the Lord well. Jesus was real to me. The Father was a friend. But there was a niggle at the back of my mind. What about the Spirit? Did I know the Holy Ghost?

I twitched at the thought and tried to wriggle out of it. Of course I knew the Spirit. It was the Spirit that made God real to me in my own experience. Without the Spirit there would be no communication with the Father, no awareness of Jesus. It was God's link between Himself and His people; the supernatural presence of God in the world. It was what the Father had sent into the world after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

But the thought persisted. *Do you really know me!* The truth came to me as clearly as if a light had been switched on in a darkened room. Did I *know Him!*

I'd always thought of the Spirit as an 'it'. A force, a power, a presence. Never a person - a 'he'. I put down my tools and wiped my hands on a grease-rag, leaning back against the tractor wheel. All these years and I'd missed such a lovely truth. The Holy Spirit was a person! Different from the Father, without a body like Jesus, but just as much a person. Of course! There was that phrase I'd often used from the pulpit: 'the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity'. He was just as much God, just as much one who possessed all the attributes of a person. True, His work was to reveal Jesus, but that made Him no less a person in His own right.

The thought intrigued me - and at the same time disturbed me. For I could not escape the fact that now closed in on me. I did not know Him.

Who was He, this mysterious and wonderful Third Person? What was He like? How could I get acquainted with Him?

It's odd, but as I began to think of the Holy Spirit in these fresh, new, personal terms I no longer felt afraid of Him. I could feel my defences slipping away, at first with much apprehension but then with more and more relief. And I felt a great weight breaking free of my shoulders.

The 'baptism in the Spirit'? The phrase still left me cold, uncomfortable. But the person Himself... Over the next few days I searched for Him in the Scriptures, and a whole new adventure began to open up for me. There He was, right at the beginning of my Bible, in the first few words of Genesis. Present at the very creation of the universe: And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters...'

Throughout the Old Testament He was there, brooding over Israel's history and occasionally stepping into events, coming and going like the wind, just as Jesus had described Him.

On into the New Testament, bearing the holy seed to Mary, sealing the Saviour's identity with the visible manifestation of a dove, leading Jesus into and out of the wilderness temptations, clearly present throughout His years of ministry and His final great triumph on the cross, in the wings at the

resurrection and ascension, coming in great power upon the first Christians at Pentecost, moving upon the Early Church and distributing His many supernatural gifts to individual believers ...

And all this time I'd not known Him. Worse, I'd *resisted* knowing Him. I saw this clearly now. It wasn't just George and Cynthia I'd been fighting - it was the Lord Himself. What a fool I'd been. And what pathetic arguments I'd put up against Him. My Methodism didn't seem to count for a great deal now. And, to my surprise, nor did it matter.

By the summer of 1967 I was half-way there. 'All right, Lord,' I said, 'I'm willing to be baptised in your Spirit, but I don't want to go babbling about in other tongues.'

I had a hang-up about the gift of tongues. I knew from George that it was often regarded as the first outward sign that someone had been filled with the Holy Spirit, but I didn't want that happening to me. It was one thing to lay aside my Methodism, but quite another to be considered Pentecostal.

Yes, I still had my pride. But God graciously dealt with this last remaining reservation in a wonderful way. For if I had sat down to think about what would help me over this final hurdle I would have said that I should like to talk to a man of God outside my own set of circumstances; a man I already had a high regard for; a man who knew his Bible and who had thought through these issues; and a man who shared my Methodism.

The person God sent along was all of these things. It was Dr Skevington Wood.

The Lord's choice, of course, was perfect. As a Bible teacher Dr Wood's ministry had been appreciated at conferences all over the world, and he was also a man I was pleased to call my friend. He came to us one Sunday afternoon in September, 1967, travelling down by train from his home in Sunderland to take our Harvest Festival service.

Over tea we began talking about the work of the Holy Spirit, but our time was short and we'd barely got into the subject when we had to leave for the meeting. With so many questions yet unasked I decided to offer Dr Wood a lift home in the car that evening (a round trip of 110 miles) and to hope for some answers on the way.

We set off at about nine o'clock and in the course of the journey I opened up my heart, sharing with my friend the events of the past year, my personal battle, my discoveries, and of course my remaining reservations.

I want to believe,' I said. I want to be filled with the Spirit, and have whatever the Lord's got for me. But .. well, I'm just not sure about some of it, like this tongues business.'

His answer took me by surprise. Dr Wood, I learned, had recently returned from a ministry tour of the Far East where he had witnessed churches in revival, moving 'in the Spirit'. Their meetings, he told me, sometimes lasted all day, beginning as early as 5.00 am and developing from one hour to the next under a powerful anointing, right through till evening. People were being saved, healed, filled with the Spirit, delivered of demons... 'It was like the Acts of the Apostles all over again,' he said And, yes, there was speaking in tongues. Interpretations. Prophecies. Words of Knowledge. All the gifts. Gifts and miracles happening all the time. The power of God demonstrated through His people. It was incredible. Incredible but wonderfully real.' Then he turned to me. 'Yes, it's of the Lord, Jim. And he can do it right here. Here in England, in Yorkshire, in Sandbuton. Seek the Lord, brother. Seek the Lord. Be open to Him. Let Him give you everything it pleases Him to give you, and then ask for more!'

I arrived back at The Limes just after three o'clock next morning, tired but excited. Dr Wood's answer had been the spur I'd needed. There were no doubts now. No reservations. No conditions. All right, Lord - your will, your way.' I wanted whatever He would give me and I couldn't get it soon enough.

It happened a couple of mornings later. I was alone in the house and down on my knees before the Lord when it seemed as though somewhere far above me a dam suddenly burst and a great torrent of love poured down upon me, washing over me in waves until I was floating in the most wonderful sense of the Lord's presence. No wonder they called it the *baptism* in the Spirit!

Yet somehow that now seemed too clinical, too limited, for as the wonderful waves swirled around me I found myself laughing and rejoicing, as uninhibited as a little child frolicking in the sea. It was refreshing, invigorating, and deeply, deeply satisfying, as though I had been lifted into heaven itself and was experiencing all the peace and love and joy that are the very heart of the Father.

'Thank you, Lord! Praise you, Jesus! Glory to God!' I struggled in my spirit for the right words, *adequate* words, and realised I possessed none. How limited was my natural vocabulary! Yet even as I was thinking this my tongue began to move around unfamiliar sounds ... words I had never learned nor understood.

I knew what was happening. I was 'speaking in tongues' - the 'tongues' of which I'd been so wary. But it wasn't the mumbo-jumbo I had once feared it to be; it was a proper language with syntax, expression, inflection. A language that emanated from the Spirit Himself and that reached way beyond the limits of my intellect to enable me to worship God on a new and deeper level. It wasn't a language that was forced upon me - I'd been so afraid of 'babbling about' in a tongue that was beyond my control but a form of expression which was mine to use at will. Clearly I could decide when to start speaking in this tongue and when to stop, how fast or slow to speak, how loud or soft to talk...

All this plus the sure knowledge that I had received a new and deeply satisfying form of communication with God.

I don't know how long this initial encounter in the Spirit lasted, five minutes? An hour? But of one thing I was sure when finally I got to my feet that September morning: this was the most wonderful thing to happen to me in 20 years of Christian experience. Why had I resisted so long?

But I knew the answer to that. Neither George nor Cynthia had ever been able fully to explain the tremendous blessing that was to be enjoyed through the baptism in the Spirit... and even if they had I wouldn't have believed them.

Cynthia, of course, was ecstatic. It had been six months since she'd been filled with the Spirit and throughout that time my stubbornness had sustained an unhappy friction in the home. Now that was all over. But best of all, we were one in a new dimension of the Spirit.

The relationship with George was healed, too. Every resentment was gone, every irritation forgotten. In their place was a deep thankfulness that the man had not given up on me. For the best part of a year he had refused to take 'no' for an answer and his perseverance had finally paid off. But what had made him so determined, I wondered, when for month after month I'd snubbed him or laughed him off?

'It was the Lord, of course,' he explained through that familiar grin the following Friday. 'Once He'd told me He needed you to be filled with the Spirit I knew I had to tell you and to keep on telling you. It was just a matter of staying true to the vision.'

I was intrigued. 'What do you mean, that he needed me to be filled with the Spirit?'

He laughed out loud. 'Well, you don't think He's blessed you just for your own benefit? No, Jim, I believe the Lord is going to do a mighty work through you and Cynthia, and He's going to do it right here on your farm. You wait and see.'

Things began to move that very evening. It was nothing dramatic, but pervading our meeting was a new sense of expectancy, a new excitement. And no wonder, now that the host had received his inheritance!

Naturally I couldn't help but share with everyone what had happened to me, and seeing as I was the one who'd been preventing the group from moving forward there was now no stopping us. From that point on we never looked back. Friday evenings now had a new purpose, a new power, and for the first time the Holy Spirit had real liberty to move upon us. It was beautiful just to watch people getting blessed.

Many of our folk wanted to know more. 'How do I receive' the infilling of the Spirit?' 'What about the gifts?' 'Does God still heal today?'

We asked George Breckon if he would lead a series of Bible studies on these subjects - something he'd been bursting to do for months - and inevitably, week after week, the Bible sessions led into ministry sessions with people receiving the baptism, rejoicing in their new prayer language, getting healed... it was like our own mini-revival.

But these Friday meetings were not just glory sessions. The work of the Spirit, we discovered, was essentially practical and as well as wanting to bless us and build our faith He was concerned with our Christian walk with the holiness of our lives. Sometimes this meant there had to be repentance, often with tears, before the Spirit could be released in our midst. Or, more often, he would use the meetings to challenge us in areas of our lives where we needed to be changed or made whole. For some it would be the need to repair a broken relationship; for others it might be a long-standing grudge that had to be dealt with; or a habit that needed to be smashed.

The way in which the Spirit tackled these issues differed too. With addictions, particularly, He would often choose to act in sovereign grace to bring immediate release. This would sometimes come as a wonderful bonus to someone being baptised in the Spirit, or simply in response to a believer's prayer.

Such was the experience of Ernest Hutchinson, one of our regulars from Northallerton. One evening he heard George preach about our body being the temple of the Holy Spirit and went home asking the Lord to break his addiction to cigarettes.

The compulsion to smoke was still there when he awoke the following morning, however, and as usual Ernest went out and bought a fresh packet of cigarettes.

It was then the Lord stepped in.

Pausing outside the shop to light up, Ernest found the taste of the tobacco so awful he had to throw the cigarette away. Halfway home he tried another, which tasted even more foul, and back at the house he tossed the packet in the dustbin. God had touched him! His desire for cigarettes had been totally removed.

More often, though, when shaping His people the Spirit would choose to bring about changes over a period of time, and He would do it through various means, not least ministering Christians.

And this is where we made a wonderful discovery: that the Lord's plan is to minister to His people not only through those Christians appointed to the role of pastor, evangelist, teacher, but also through ordinary Christians - housewives, mechanics, shop assistants, farmers (!) - *anyone* who will receive a spiritual gift by faith.

This is what we saw beginning to happen on Friday evenings. Ordinary Christians - some who normally would not so much as open their mouths in a meeting - ministering to the whole group through the gifts of the Spirit.

Most often it would happen after a time of praise. From over here would come a prophecy (not a prediction, but the speaking forth of words given by God for a specific situation or persons)... from over there a message in tongues spoken audibly for all to hear... and from across the room, moments later, the interpretation of that message, again revealing the mind of God...

Other gifts, we discovered, like a word of wisdom or knowledge, would be exercised at a crucial moment when counselling someone... while the gifts of faith and healing often went hand-in-hand when praying for a member of the group with physical or emotional needs.

Some gifts were less easy to define but equally vital in a given situation, such as when we were praying for George and Gladys during one of their preaching trips to Denmark. While we were lifting them up before the Lord I suddenly saw before me a living picture - like a video - of a meeting in progress. George was in the pulpit, apparently preaching with great liberty to a packed auditorium, when all at once the mood of the meeting changed. Before my eyes, as though projected on to the opposite wall of our lounge, I saw a man leap from his seat, jump on to the platform and try to push George aside so that he could commandeer the microphone. A scuffle began as members of the platform party - possibly local pastors - rushed to George's aid. At that point, as abruptly as it had appeared, the picture faded.

Instantly I began to share what I had seen, believing it to have been given for a specific purpose, and then we began praying against any attack of the enemy upon George's mission, particularly the disruption of the meeting which we knew would be taking place at that same time.

When George returned to us the following week we learned that what I had seen on the 'video' had been exactly what had taken place that evening in Denmark, and that we had been alerted in prayer at the very time the incident had occurred.

Exactly which gift the Spirit used that night was unclear - perhaps the gift of revelation; a visual word of knowledge. Or maybe it was a straightforward vision. It didn't really matter; the Spirit was at work and that was exciting.

Again, on other evenings, we would witness the hand of the Lord upon our gathering as the Spirit touched one here, another here in ways that the Scriptures did not define as gifts but which were no less clear manifestations of His presence. Some of these put me in mind of Rev'd Ransome's experiences in Nigeria. Just as he had witnessed men weeping uncontrollably in prayer, so we too now saw the Spirit stir members of the group to intercede with tears and emotion for a particular person or problem. Likewise, as our missionary friend had seen black Christians moved to riotous laughter - 'laughing in the Spirit' - so, from time to time, the Lord would touch first one and then another in our meetings with this wonderfully joyful expression of the rejoicing that is part of His own heart.

But not everyone was smiling. From the moment our meetings had taken this upward turn there had been those who disapproved. This was to be expected, I suppose, yet it was strange to hear all the arguments I'd once put up against the baptism myself now coming from the lips of others. 'Those things aren't for today.' 'That's for Pentecostals, not Methodists.' 'Tongues are of the devil.'

And so we lost a number of folk, some of whom we'd regarded as good friends, and that hurt. It hurt too when other Christians, some from our own church, avoided us in the town as though we'd caught some terrible disease. And worst of all when some of our own relatives turned against us. (They thought we'd got some sort of religious mania. Praise God, we'd never been more sane.)

But for every one we lost, the Lord seemed to send along another two. Word of what the Spirit was doing at The Limes was spreading fast and each week it seemed we were welcoming new faces. 'If they keep coming at this rate,' I quipped to Cynthia, 'we'll need to pray for elastic walls in the lounge!' The room was 18 x 20 and more than 40 people were now squeezing in each week.

They came from near and far - the curious, the hungry, the burdened and the beaming. From every denomination and walk of life. Those who had been following the Lord for many years, and those who had only just begun.

Of course, some of these new Christians were our own contacts. Evangelism, after all, was still our priority. Nothing had changed in that respect, except that the power we had received through the baptism had enabled us to witness more effectively. And that was how it should have been; indeed, there would have been something very wrong if after being filled with the Spirit we had become more inward looking than outward reaching. That would have been to deny the very reason we'd been given the power. What was it Jesus had told his disciples? 'Ye shall be my witnesses, once the Holy Ghost has come upon you.'

Witnesses. That was really what the work of the Spirit at The Limes was all about. The baptism, the gifts, the healings... all these benefits were for the ultimate purpose of equipping God's people so that in the *power of the Spirit* they could tell others about the Lord.

And now we had a message for Christians, too. For George had been right - there *was* something more. Life in the Spirit. What a wonderful discovery!

But if I thought I'd arrived I had another thing coming.