

The Grieving Bridegroom

By Hollis Vaughn

In 1994 I (Michael) met a wonderful older saint named Hollis Vaughn. We spent about three days together at his home in Marshall, Texas, sharing with one another some of the treasures that the Lord had been putting in our hearts over the years. I think that in all truth, I came away with the most spiritual wealth from that encounter. Here is a story that Hollis wrote and shared with me before I left.

I shook the cobwebs from my head as I went to answer the knock which had awakened me. I don't think too clearly at two o'clock in the morning so it was little wonder that he looked different standing there in the dark. He was obviously upset and concerned about something, so he didn't say much as he slumped into a chair next to the couch. I guess I must have appeared still somewhat dazed from being jarred awake from such a sound sleep. So we sat in silence for awhile as each of us wandered through our maze of thoughts.

John had been my pastor all my Christian life. He had always been there when I needed a strong arm to lean on or a word of counsel. But he was more than my pastor, he was a dear friend. He had sat hours on end as I had poured out to him the intimate details of my mixed-up life. Never once had he condemned me. Never once had he expressed shock or disappointment. True, he had corrected me. He had many times, like a skilled detective who pieces together the evidence, pointed out the areas in my life where the enemy was able to enter and harass me. He had even rebuked me on occasion, but never had he condemned or belittled me. He was a rare individual who would never betray a confidence. But now, here he was, looking as if he needed to have someone who would listen to the deep hurts and complaints of his heart.

John breathed out a long sigh and began to speak as if he were just thinking out loud. "She doesn't really know me nor understand my needs after all these years."

I was now wide awake. I don't know what I had assumed John's problem was but I most assuredly didn't think Mary could be the cause. I didn't understand her at times and often she seemed to be caught up in her own little world; nevertheless she was an exceptional woman. She was outstandingly beautiful for her age and seemed to be the ideally devoted wife.

I almost felt like saying, "Cheer up, John! Things will look better in the daylight." But I restrained myself for this was not the first time he had come knocking at an odd hour of the night, I felt honored that one of such stature would come to me but deep inside there was the unanswered question, "Why does he wait until the middle of the night to want to talk? Why doesn't he come over for lunch or discuss these things over coffee or when we go fishing? Why these bizarre hours?"

There had been so many mornings when I had stumbled about with bloodshot eyes and incoherent thoughts; and my wife would remark, "You had company last night. Pastor John again?" She was used to these visits .and never resented his coming, although I'm sure she also wondered why he didn't come around more during the daylight-light hours.

He has so busy with the huge church that he pastored that I fully expected him to share some problem he was having with the deacon board or the music department. But Mary! I never expected that, and I suppose he sensed d my shock as we sat there in semi-darkness.

"Mary just doesn't seem to understand my needs," he continued. "She's so energetic and compulsive, she will dive into house work or cooking with such an excitement. It is amazing, how much she can get accomplished. But then at night when want quality time with her--she's so exhausted she can't respond. I know the children are a drain on her and so many people come to her for counsel and advice--she has little time left for me. I'm hurt, and I'm lonely and just a little angry!"

I sat bewildered as I listened. As yet, John had not asked a question, for which I was grateful. I certainly had no answers. I was numb with shock. I could not imagine that this giant among men had problems-of such magnitude that he would be so visibly moved. Finally admitting that he may have some marital complications, I could not possibly imagine how I could offer any solution. After all, John was my confident.

He had given a sympathetic ear to my perplexities and had given me godly counsel all these years. Perhaps, he just wanted to talk. The least I could do was listen.

"Do you know, when we first fell in love, she used to sing to me. She had an old beat-up guitar which she strummed as she sang love songs to me. It was always out of tune and she didn't play well, but I loved those times." His voice seemed to trail off into

some distant memory as he continued, "Since then she's taken voice lessons and uses taped background music. The church loves it--but I miss her off key singing and that old guitar."

I watched John as he seemed to slip back into one of the rooms of his memory--trying to recapture some priceless moment long past. My heart was now aching for him as I, for the first time, saw a side of him I had never seen before. He was deeply in love with Mary, and she was hurting him. He felt rejected. I knew instinctively that he had not come for any answer nor some word of counsel that I might have. He just wanted to talk--to bare his heart.

John glanced up suddenly and caught me off guard with the fierceness of his look. "I've always wanted a large family," he blurted. I couldn't believe my ears. Their family was so large now that it was a joke to all the neighborhood, I've never seen so many completely different children in one family. There were one or two who definitely took after John. They had his temperament and depth. The rest were like a patchwork quilt of Mary's little quirks and compulsions. I couldn't believe John was being critical or was hurt because of the size of his family.

With what I'm sure amplified the incredulous feeling I was experiencing, I sputtered, "But John, you have a house full of children. They're running over each other now. Mary's not a baby factory. She's run ragged taking care of the children you now have."

I felt a little twinge of irritation at John for his unreasonable desires. His eyes locked onto mine, and his next remark left me reeling in shock and disbelief. "Most of our children do not belong to me. I did not father them. I love them and care for them as if they were my own, but I did not father them."

I sat in stunned silence. I had known John and Mary for most of my life. Even before I had become a Christian they had been a "thing" in the neighborhood. Everyone knew they would marry eventually. I knew some thing that many did not know. Mary had been married before to a very cruel and abusive husband. He had left her bruised and bleeding on more than one occasion. I also knew that she had brought no children into this marriage. I could not believe that Mary was adulterous. I had seen her flirt with many men but rather than be critical I passed it off as just being her friendly outgoing personality. There were times when she had been extremely friendly with me--perhaps too much--but then, we'd known each other for a very long time.

"John, do you mean to tell me that Mary has been unfaithful? Are you saying other men fathered most of your children?" By this time, tears were streaming down his face; and I could see the deep hurt in his eyes.

He nodded almost imperceptibly and softly continued, "It's no secret that Mary has been married before. Her first marriage left her spiritually and emotionally scarred. There is within her an area that pulls her back into that same type of situation again and again. It's as if she's trying to punish herself by some self destructive action. She has come to me time and again in deep remorse and tears, begging me not to throw her out and not to stop loving her. Of course, I can't do either for my life is wholly wrapped up in her."

I walked over and put my arms around him and felt his whole body convulse with sobs. We held each other for just a moment and I was thankful that no prying eyes were viewing this scene lest it should be misunderstood.

Then I asked very softly, "John, does anyone else know about this? Have you discussed this with others?" He nodded, "Yes, there are a few who know but not many."

"Has anyone talked with her, counseled her, admonished her?" I asked. I was hoping this wouldn't get out of hand. What a foolish thought, for it had been out of hand for years.

Again he confirmed, "There have been many who have talked with her and warned her of the consequences of her actions. She behaves beautifully for awhile but then seems to slip back into her old pattern again. It's worse now than it has been in a long time."

"Would you like for me to speak to her?" I asked. I didn't quite know what I'd say and besides I was somewhat nettled that John had shared all these things with others before he had come to me. But that would soon be clarified.

"Yes," he answered. "Go tell my wife that I want her, not her services. Tell her that I am saddened by her frenzied activity. Try to convey to her how I miss her love songs and that I don't get joy out of her singing to others. Most of all, beg her to stop seeing her lovers and flirting with strangers. Tell her for me. Maybe she will listen to you."

He sighed heavily as he rose to leave; and even as he was walking out the door, I heard myself saying as I had so many times in the past, "Please, don't stop loving me. I'm sorry I have run after other lovers and have not been faithful to you. Please help me to get my priorities in order!"

Does that sound like something strange to say to your pastor? Well, you see, my pastor was actually Jesus; and Mary is this flirtatious church with whom He is vitally concerned. This is something the Lord actually disclosed to me in the night hours as He revealed to me His wounded heart.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus speaks to the seven churches commending them for their strength and faithfulness but lovingly pointing out their failures. The first letter is to the church at Ephesus: and His reproof to her was, "[But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.](#)" I feel sure, since this is the first in order, that it likely heads the list in importance.

The first complaint He shared with me was, "She doesn't understand Me. She's so busy she doesn't have the energy nor time to spend in intimacy with Me." Most Christians mistakenly believe that time spent in "God's house" is all that is necessary for their spiritual growth and productivity. May I suggest that most time spent in the average church service is not only poor quality but in many cases actually wasted. Most church meetings bless us but not our Lord. In the majority of cases, it has been our intellect--our soulish man--which has been fed rather than our spirit.

There is in the natural man an anti-Christ spirit which makes him want to pay for his redemption. He needs to feel as if he had a large part in saving himself. All cults and the occult are based on this premise. See them standing on the street corners with their magazines or knocking on your door with their canned speeches and joyless expressions. Meet them in the airport terminals with their flowers and tales of deception. Watch them parade down the crowded thoroughfares in their frenzied self-flagellation, hoping to gain acceptance to their god through their own pain and sacrifice.

Cain was guilty of this anti-Christ spirit. He brought unto the Lord the produce of the soil--a product of his own labor. It a sacrifice; but it was not acceptable, it did not

contain life represented the blood. Not only did God not accept his offering but warned him that "...sin is crouching at the door."

Martha was so busy. I'm sure she was cooking and washing pots and pans--all the necessities which accompany having a guest in the home. She wanted to be a proper hostess. She received a startling shock when Jesus told her in so many words, "Martha! With all your service, your cumbersome toil and worry, you're still missing the precious treasure that Mary has discovered by sitting at My feet. You think it is wasted time, but it is the most precious time you could spend." Our heavenly husband is after quality time spent in His presence. There is no substitute of equal value.

His next concern was how His wife sang for others and to others but not to Him. This is one of the most deadly traps into which singers fall. To my knowledge, there is not one reference in scripture where singers sang solos for the congregation.

After their great deliverance from Pharaoh and the host of the Egyptians, Moses and the sons of Israel sang a song unto the Lord. It fills almost all of the fifteenth chapter of the book of Exodus.

The entire fifth chapter of the book of Judges is an account of the song which Deborah and Barak sang unto the Lord because of His great defeat of Sisera, commander of the armies of Canaan. The closest thing I can recall where a man ministered in song and music to another person or persons is where David played before Saul; and the evil spirits departed and Saul's spirit was quieted. Notice, David did not play to Saul nor for Saul but before him. He simply worshipped the Lord in Saul's presence and that anointed playing was more than the demons could take. I think there is a place where a person can play and sing unto the Lord in the presence of the congregation, and the Lord is pleased and the people are blessed. But that is extremely rare. Usually "special singing" is ministry to the house rather than to the Lord.

Most singers spend the bulk of their time in preparation of arrangements, enunciation, voice inflection, background music, proper microphones and P.A. systems, stage posturing and gestures. For whom is all this energy expended?

Ministers will spend days in the preparation of sermons. Many will start with an outline and then write in longhand or type the entire sermon. Their preaching is then delivered verbatim from the printed page. I am not saying that this is entirely wrong. There is a

place for honing the sword to a keen edge. However, the people have pressed ministers into an unnatural (unspiritual) position until they have become sermon factories. They read the Bible with the sole purpose of wresting from it a sermon. Instead of searching for the mind of the Lord and what He wishes to say to the church, the word becomes a challenge of alliteration and word games. These sermons are usually packed with information which stirs the emotion and thrills the soul but does very little for the spirit.

I know personally that it is not only possible but an ever-present danger that the one who ministers the word can become cold and indifferent to the mind of the Spirit even as he spends hours preparing messages about the Spirit. My daily prayer has become, "Lord, I don't want to minister from the intellect but from the Spirit. I'm tired of ministering words without life."

We seem to not fully understand Jesus' words as He uttered this divine revelation, ["It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. \(John 6:63\) Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing \(no thing\) of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father doest these things the Son also does in like manner."](#) (John 5:19)

Unless we are ministering by the Spirit those things we see by the Spirit--then we are ministering out of our own intellect (flesh); and it will profit nothing. All it will do is convey information, and the Bible says, "...knowledge puffeth up," or makes arrogant.

I'm sure our Lord is not only grieved but angry with shepherds, whose primary responsibility is to bring people to the true Shepherd and ever direct their affections toward Him; however, they have set themselves up as the "vicar of Christ" or a Nicolaitan overlord who rules the people by cunning speech, overpowering personality or outright deceit. The bride of Christ is drawn away from her true Husband by craftiness and slight of hand and is lured into a bed of adultery, where she is seduced by strangers. This immoral union brings forth illegitimate children who are assumed to be sons of God; when in fact, they are sons of the devil. God loves them and cares for them, but they do not have the blood of Jesus Christ flowing in their veins.

We have made entrance into the kingdom of God so effortless--so tasteless and antiseptic. Nature itself teaches us that birthing is agonizing, noisy and messy. In the modern delivery room, nurses and doctors administer pain killers, anesthetics, saddle

blocks; and there is performed an increasing number of Cesarean section deliveries. Each is designed to alleviate the pain and/or hasten the delivery.

For one to be birthed into the kingdom of God in today's modern church, all that is necessary is for the candidate to come forward before the church and declare his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Subsequently, he is baptized publicly. Now I am aware that it can be this simple or apparently so, but we have made it a formula. We even have "birthing rooms" in the event they desire to pray or cry aloud. "Unnecessary," we cry! "Don't exhibit your pain, shame, nor your repentance before the congregation! Do that alone! Leave our 'hospital' sterile and unruffled."

Because of our spiritual anesthetics and easy birthing, we have invited numerous children into the family of God, promising them a life without suffering and pain. True, our family has increased in number and our ranks of our brotherhood have swollen; but our Father is grieved because so many are illegitimate. They bear His name but no blood relationship exists. The unfortunate thing is that they truly believe they are part of His family.

Because of our fleshly desire to help increase his family, we have, like Abraham, joined with a worldly system and produced an innumerable number of Ishmaels. Although there is a love in our heart for these step children yet, they are not the chosen offsprings who are called Abraham's seed. Remember, God loved Ishmael and, according to His promise, blessed him.

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 17:20)

"And God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What is the matter with you Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand; for I will make a great nation of him.'" (Genesis 21:17,18)

The Lord blessed Ishmael, made him the father of twelve princes; and he became a great nation. The present Arab nations are a result of these twelve princes. Nevertheless, God's purposes were designed to be fulfilled through Isaac.

As we look about at the modern church with its methods, formulas, and systematic birthing programs, we will be deceived unless we pay close heed to the pattern. Because God loves these stepchildren and blesses them abundantly, we assume the methods of birthing are also blessed.

I could almost wish that when we miss the will of the Father we, and all those about us, could hear His voice of displeasure immediately, loud and clear. In my childish way, I think it would be simpler if, on occasion, the Lord thundered His disapproval. Then we wouldn't run after all those strange lovers. Then we wouldn't give birth to illegitimate children. Then we wouldn't "entertain the troops." We would sing only to Him. Then we wouldn't become so exhausted trying to earn merit points and little stars by our names. Then we would have more quality time to spend in His presence. Right? Wrong!

Strange indeed! For that is precisely what Israel thought. Give us some rules to live by, and we will obey you. When He did speak to them at the reading of the Ten Commandments, they cried in alarm to Moses.

"Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."
(Exodus 20:19)

The truth of the matter is, God does speak to us immediately when we miss His will. It is not a voice which causes the mountain to tremble nor does it gush forth out of fire and smoke; but it is a still small voice coming forth from the altar of His temple--deep within your bosom--if you are His child. He still thunders His disapproval at our whorish attitudes and behavior, but His voice is muffled and muted by the pandemonium of other voices. Sadly, most Christians do not even know the voice of the Beloved.

If you listen closely, you can hear the soft sobs of a wounded husband as He groans out His complaint. "What more could be done than what I have done? How could I have loved more completely? Surely, they are not so blind or callused."

These are critical days, my friends. Be on the alert lest you be taken in and deceived by the philosophies of men. Human wisdom will lead you increasingly away from the heart of a loving Father. As this year closes, let us frequently steal away to that secret place and learn Him.



