

Chapter 10

Fathering the Next Generation

Who will do all the work?

Who will be the people to start all those necessary house-churches? Who will be carrying out the fivefold ministries? Who will do all the work? And where will all those people come from? Ultimately, we would all agree that it will have to be ordinary people made extraordinary by God – people who, as in the old days,

may still smell of fish, perfume and revolution. If elders are to father house churches, we will simply have to spot and develop potential elders. Elders are people of wisdom and reality and, typically, fathers or mothers of families. Many 'family ministries' already exist today. Could it be that we may actually be doing most of the training and developing of elders – and therefore church-planters – but not seeing the connection between the role of sound and healthy families and church-planting?

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Policemen without uniforms?

Leadership development within our traditional structures has often meant preparing people to grow up in order to fit the existing structure and maintain it and, if possible, extend it. Leaders have often been 'made' by prescribing authority to them, 'ordaining' them. In many countries, however, this type of authority is deeply suspect. Many have seen political or religious leaders with honey on their lips and an iron whip in their hand. One of these groups is what is called 'Generation X', the bulk of the present young generation in the West. The last

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type of authority which Generation X, and other groups like post-communist Russians, will accept, is institutionalized authority, prescribed from above, authority which needs a superstructure to authorize it with titles, badges, medals and

uniforms. Imagine a policeman who, in his spare time, is standing at a crossroads without his uniform, trying to direct the traffic. He will be ridiculed, ignored or even run over by the cars, because he does not wear his uniform. Many churches feel like this unhappy policeman, sensing that the population does not take the religious collars, crosses, colourful shirts, robes and headgear sufficiently seriously. People feel that the life of the church as they have experienced it does not match the revolutionary message of the gospel they sometimes hear. As a result, they take the liberty of ignoring church uniforms, and authority prescribed and ordained from a distant superstructure. They require, in other words, leadership that is earned amongst them, proven in gifted servanthood on a daily basis.

Does our leadership training truly develop leaders?

Traditionally we have been asking God to 'fling out workers into the harvest', praying for Him to provide more people. As the twelve disciples did this, they became an immediate answer to their own prayers: they got flung out themselves first (Mt. 9,10). If we truly desire to see more people involved in taking on responsibilities in the Kingdom of God, we will invariably be involved ourselves and drawn into the process. For this purpose we today arrange recruiting conferences for young people, see them dedicate themselves at 'altars', arrange mission mobilization events, beat the drum for our mission group or organization, conduct leadership and training seminars, establish and multiply Bible schools and theological training institutes, and write books and teaching materials. This is good, but is it good enough? At the heart of spiritual leadership in the New Testament is not head knowledge or special abilities or even the wish to lead, but an innocent capacity to obey God. I believe it was my friend Greg Groh from the World Leadership Council who said to me: 'I have only one problem with current Christian leadership training. It does not train leaders.'

Training leaders or raising sons?

As the ministries of Barnabas and Paul, then Paul and Timothy, or Elijah and Elisha show, apostolic and prophetic ministries produce new people, very much as fathers 'give birth' to sons and daughters. Paul writes to Galatians: 'My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you . . . I am perplexed about you' (Gal. 4:19,20). He does not address them as his students, disciples or trainees, but as his children. This is probably one of the true

hallmarks of New Testament and contemporary apostolic people: they are constantly in spiritual labour. It is unnatural for a man to give birth to children, since that is the gift of women. Still, people are born again by the Spirit, and, I suggest, also born into ministry by the same Spirit. As any Bible school dean will agree, the mechanical process of a student going through some teaching modules and experiencing a transfer of head knowledge will not produce strong leaders. There is much more to it, namely the fathering of spiritual sons and daughters. The core issue is this: we may want to train many new leaders, but God the Father wants us simply to raise spiritual sons. To raise a son is much more than just teaching him a few lessons or courses. As anyone with children knows, there is no pain-free parenting. It is utterly involving, frustrating and exhilarating at the same time; it brings you to your knees or drives you up the wall, makes you weep and laugh, and usually you end up perplexed, just like Paul, about your children and, often enough, about yourself. It is the most engaging task I know. This is the price we need to pay for the spiritual generations to come. Are we ready for this? Cheap training shortcuts, emergency crash-courses, relationally uninvolved seminars and purely academic efforts are as effective as quick-fix parenting and pain-free book-writing.

Church-planting starts in the kid's room

One of the qualifications of a biblical elder is that 'he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?' (1 Tim. 3:4). This first litmus test of authenticity of someone's character and personality through his very

own children is so ingenious and natural that I sometimes jokingly remark that 'church-planting starts in the kid's room'. Healthy children respect true authority, but naturally avoid empty authoritarian behaviour and cold dicta-

torship without proper character. If ever a father makes the mistake of demanding and not commanding obedience, he has lost his child right there. No amount of stubborn threats and punishment will win back that lost trust; only true brokenness, humble tears and asking forgiveness from your own child will get you ahead.

I strongly believe that God can use young children for his purposes, because His Holy Spirit, residing in kids who are born again, is not two, five or seven years old, but it is the age-old Holy Spirit, capable of theoretically doing anything that a mature and old disciple can do in the power of the same Spirit. However, there is a difference. It has become fashionable to arrange short-term evangelistic ministry and summer outreach trips for young kids and unmarried adults, and the results of such trips for the kids are mostly positive. Most pastors I have asked, however, agree that for the establishment of churches, evangelistic short-term ministries of young unmarried adults is rather limited. Although Jesus himself and people like Timothy were unmarried, God has chosen generally to link the establishing of His church with the socially proven lives of fathers and mothers, qualifying in real life as capable fathers for their sons and daughters, and reflecting the loving and passionate heartbeat of the Father in heaven.

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Master and disciples, not teacher and students

The issue of raising a new generation of spiritual sons and daughters for bringing in God's harvest is about life transfer. Life was literally breathed and rubbed into others. It was caught over a period of time, not just taught. The biblical model of doing this was through the close and natural, and even lifetime, relationship between a master and his disciples, a father and his spiritual sons who imitate him naturally and unashamedly. A professor brilliantly teaching his students, but not being much involved in their lives, is no match for the efficiency of a father and his spiritual sons. Masters and spiritual fathers do not just train their disciples in the technical sense: they give birth to them and raise them, and quite literally, as Jesus did with his disciples, inject their spirit into them and therefore reproduce themselves.

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I have sat under many fascinating professors and teachers, but to be honest, I usually do not remember a word they said – but I remember the way they were, and that is what has stayed with me. As master and disciples share lives, not 45 minutes

in a sterile classroom every week, they are able to love, show, coach, correct and encourage each other. They make themselves vulnerable to each other. This is what it takes to make disciples, and to make disciples is one of the core commands of Jesus. We cannot delegate this task to paper or a programme or do it by radio or from a pulpit or a director's chair. A programme can no more make a disciple than a machine can make a son. Discipleship is about people getting involved with each other. It is about masters and disciples, spiritual fathers and sons, finding each other; and then it involves a process of nurturing and release.

Sons without fathers

Sons and spiritual disciples do not really want to be part of your wonderful programme: they want you! Have you ever wondered why it is that many of today's church leaders are in their leadership position not *because of* but *in spite of* those who should be their spiritual fathers? Why is it that, unlike Jesus, many contemporary leaders not only have a history of breaking away from existing churches, denominations and organizations in order to live out their own calling, but have a sizeable track record of spiritual sons turning away from them also, often bitterly disappointed, to start their own thing? Does the trauma which goes with having to break away in order to break out affect – and in fact curse – Christian ministry much more than we ever dared to think?

The way we inherit is as important as what we inherit

It is beyond question that, for the remaining task of discipling the 230-plus nations of this world, we will need scores of bold, radical, fearless and faithful leaders, young and old. Most of the older generation of Christians are in agony about where the young and able ones are who will step into their footsteps and carry on their life's work. Could it be that this fear is related to the way the generations are currently relating to each other? Has a pattern emerged, woven through with habitual sin, which effectively makes the young and older leaders split from each other before they can become effective together? Or worse, has an unbroken curse been handed down through the generations leaving both of them trapped, hindering the effective passing of the baton from one generation to another to see God's work on earth completed?

Why is it that spiritual initiatives are still constantly being reinvented by the emerging generations, who feel they need to break away from their spiritual or physical father's beaten path and start all over again, rather than finishing an inherited course? I suspect that the way we inherit is as important as what we inherit. Many older leaders, just like some fathers, are so afraid of letting other and younger leaders take over, that they only release the steering wheel as they literally drop dead. If we inherit over a dead body, or from somebody who only grudgingly, or because of some serious sickness, gives up control, it will only be a bitter-sweet experience.

I have often wondered why Jesus could 'retire' at an age of approximately 33, and not 65. Once His redeeming work on the cross was done, He could go home because He had introduced and instated His disciples into the proper inheritance of the Father in heaven. I know that I am not much qualified to write this, since I often feel to be just a miserable father myself. But I am toying with the idea of retiring at 50, and I dream of using all the energy that God may leave me to invest in the up-and-coming generation, and be available to as many as I can as one of their spiritual fathers.

'Be a father to him'

One December evening in 1996 I was sitting with Rudi Pinke of Christliches Zentrum Frankfurt. I admire Rudi, a former journalist, since I feel he is one of those radical new church leaders, ready to go and do the unthinkable. I shared with him what I felt the Holy Spirit is doing around the world, about the reinvention of house churches, multiplying cell churches, miracles, strategic alliances and all that. Suddenly he looked at me and exclaimed: 'Wolfgang, we here are just not radical enough!' Now if it

had been almost any other pastor I know, I would most likely have politely smiled and thought to myself, 'You don't know how right you are.' But this was Rudi Pinke. And there in his office it struck me. To be radical is not the point. It is not nearly enough. And I was reminded of another incident that had happened recently.

There he stood, one metre away from me, pale, stiff and seemingly unable to move. I had just preached in this radical church in Germany, a typical mission-mobilization type of a sermon: go and see your nation disciplined, for God's sake think the unthinkable, do the undoable, raise the dead, and plant 50,000 churches in Germany. The pastor had made an altar call. For some reason I never like altar calls, and usually try to escape to the side. But the young man had caught me even as I was hiding behind a pillar. He came close and stood in front of me. I remembered that he was a youth leader in the church, deeply committed; he knew his stuff, was respected, and, I am sure, was at that time included in many prayers of unmarried girls in the church.

I did not know what to do, so I prayed that God could give me a hint. 'Be a father to him,' I heard God's Spirit speak to me. So I hugged this young man, and prayed like a father would pray to bless a son. I was stunned with his reaction. He melted like an block of ice in my arms, cried streams of tears, and just soaked in whatever there was to be soaked in. Later, his mother joined us, and repented of the sin of having her own plans for her son, rather than letting God take charge of him. I will never forget that incident. We just stood there; he wept, she wept, I wept. And there something dawned on me for the first time.

At first, I was just wondering whether it is of any significance that the very last word of the Old Testament is 'curse'. Malachi 4:5,6 reads: 'See, I will send you the

prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.' What immediately follows is a history of rebels and political factions, war and tensions, a leaderless time which the Bible prefers not to even mention. Could it be that the current unredeemed, unrestored relationships between fathers and children is not just the old generational problem we all know, circling around issues like contemporary

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fashions, the length of hair and the style of music, but the spiritual result of fathers withholding their hearts from their children? They do it usually by repeating an ungodly tradition, because their own fathers have done it too. As a result, we may well be handing down a curse through the generations, instead of releasing blessing.

The tears that break the curse

Just imagine yourself, a spiritual son, resting at the heart of a spiritual father who is expressing his unconditional love for you, who tells you that you are the jewel of his life, someone to be very proud of, a dream come true, and who leaves a fond tear of fatherly love and affirmation on your cheek as you leave him. Or imagine yourself, a spiritual father, hugged by a son, physically warming your heart, who tells you how proud he is of you, how secure he is in your presence, who openly admires your wisdom, gives

you his heart on a silver platter and says: 'Tell me how I can be like you. What shall I do with my life?'

In that instant, something happens in both of you. A wholeness is restored which the devil wanted to steal. The father is enabled to stand up and be radical, forgetting what the neighbours are going to think and say, and boldly stand up for Kingdom values and visions, because something gives him almost unbearable strength and drive: a son believes in him and has given him his heart. In a similar fashion something clicks in the heart of the son. He is endowed with a sense of security and purpose. He can boldly go through closed doors, raise the dead, do what no one has ever dared to do before, because there is a father who loves him, believes in him, has said so and has proved it. In fact, in both of them a curse is broken, and a blessing is released.

Pounding on the door

I will never forget an incident which happened during a DAWN conference in Nottingham in 1995. I was in a seminar on youth-church planting. A young man in his early twenties stood up and expressed his passion and concern for his generation, and related the story of how they had started a youth church. Suddenly, he surprised everybody by taking up a chair and, starting to pray, pounding the chair violently against the floor.

The reaction of the spectators varied. Some were appalled by this obvious un-English and indisciplined behaviour: 'That chair might break!' Others were just puzzled.

As I sat there, I felt God's Spirit say to me: 'See, he is knocking at the door of the Father's heart with all his might. He had a lot of teachers, professors, directors, coaches, preachers, almost anything – except a spiritual father.'

A rebel is a radical without the father's heart

If fathers and mothers turn their hearts to their sons and daughters, and sons and daughters turn their hearts to their fathers and mothers – according to the biblical pattern it should start with the fathers! – a new and healthy framework will be created, within which true, bold, radical Christianity and leadership can and will grow. If this does not happen, boldness will quickly turn into rebellion, and use its strength to break and tear, rather than to build and complete. We have many radicals today, in both generations, most of them growing into rebels. A rebel is a radical without the father's – or the son's – heart. He is left with one of the deepest traumas anyone can have: he is lost in the generational stream without a secure anchor, and has become a spiritual orphan.

When heaven opened at the time of the baptism of Jesus, most of us remember the dove. But there was a voice from heaven of a father who publicly declared: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!' Could it be that this was the real start and launching pad for the ministry of Jesus, the Son and lover of His father, the greatest secret of His strength hidden in the statement: 'I and the Father are one'?

Spiritual orphans

Whoever is launched into existence without having been given a father's heart may very well end up a spiritual orphan. A study done by Dr Pierre Rentchnick in 1975 under the title *Orphans Rule the World* has proved that many people who made their radical mark on history were in fact orphans. Nearly 300 of the world's most influential politicians were orphans: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles V and Louis XIV, George

Washington and Napoleon, as well as Lenin, Hitler, Stalin and Castro. This is similarly true for religious leaders: Moses, Buddha, Confucius and Mohammad where all orphans. The trauma of growing up fatherless bottled up enormous energy which they used to prove themselves to the world, because they had never heard a loving father say, 'Well done, son!', never rejoiced, relished and relaxed in that knowledge and security.

Many churches, denominations and organizations have unwillingly given birth to a wave of children who are spiritual orphans, fatherless leaders who had to break away in order to obey their life-calling. Many people in Europe lament that two world wars have killed our fathers; whole generations have been bombed away. When the wars started, 'all the daredevils went to the front and died. Who was clever enough to stay behind? The accountants. And today we have inherited their genes and drown in a flood of bureaucracy!' says my friend Bob Smart of Reading, UK, with that dark, spot-on English humour. He meant it as a joke, but maybe there is more truth to it than meets the eye.

Spiritual fathering is one of the greatest needs of today's Generation X, many of them unable to believe in the consistent and unfailing love of the father in heaven because of their fathers on earth. They are over entertained and underfathered. They are, in fact, spiritual orphans.

Turning hearts in order to prepare people for Jesus

In Luke 1 there is a startling verse about John the Baptist: 'He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' In obvious fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi about the 'second Elijah', his ministry is to roll out the red carpet for King

Jesus. His own father Zechariah doubted: 'How can I be sure of this?', since he might have had other great plans for an eventual son. Zechariah had to undergo a radical spiritual surgery before he was to be filled with the Spirit and join his own son in prophetic ministry (Lk. 1:76). The life-message of John the Baptist was 'Repent!', turning the hearts of the fathers away from their sins and traditions and their eyes towards the coming son, Jesus: 'Look, the Lamb of God . . . This is the one!' (Jn. 1:29, 30). The turning of the hearts to the Father and His Son is in obvious relationship with 'making ready a people prepared for the Lord'. John had a prophetic ministry: turning the hearts in order to make people ready for Jesus.

Releasing nations

Brian Mills, intercessory prayer leader in England and a dear fatherly friend, is one of those men and women who still can weep unashamedly and openly; one who loves children and therefore has more spiritual children than he and his wife probably know. As we discussed this issue of parents and children he told me how England gave birth during the period of the British Empire to some 44 nations. But instead of giving her heart to those children, Britain took what was most precious, their natural and human resources and the political fame of ruling those nations. Britain robbed the children instead of fathering them, and now has a spiritual debt to repay to nations like India, which still celebrates its independence, but needs help to move on into liberty. As individual and spiritual fathers turn their hearts to their children, denominations to their unwanted offspring, organizations to their breakaways, and colonial nations to the emerging nations, and not only in symbolic or fleeting acts of political diplomacy, it will cause a release because it will be breaking a curse.

Encouraging healthy radicals

To disciple whole nations by spreading house churches into every corner until countries are full of them is a radical thought for many and requires a special

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kind of faith. But yesterday's radicals are often today's trusted pillars of the church. If we want to see a multitude of Christians take up their calling and inheritance in the Kingdom of God and go and see whole nations, people groups, cities and regions disciplined, we need to provide for them an atmosphere and an environment where they can be growing up healthily and without the trauma of being spiritual orphans. To be radical usually means to be ready to walk on thin ice, and even if no one we respect is there to really believe in us, we would still do it.

I would like to call us all to a prophetic, concerted and systematic effort to encourage the remaining and emerging fathers among us to start this process, and give their hearts to the sons. That in turn will allow the sons also to give their hearts to their fathers.

This last prophecy of Malachi seems to me the most impossible and challenging thing of all, staunchly resisted by any devil on earth, since he knows and fears what would happen. We therefore need to call upon God and his Holy Spirit Himself to come and melt the hearts, crack the walls, bridge the gaps, break the curse, apply the redemption Jesus has accomplished at the cross in our lives and churches and organizations, and pray to God to light fires, throw bombs, thunder from heaven or do whatever it takes to make fathers and sons run into each other's arms.

Following anti-leaders

Many prophets say that the future leaders of the Kingdom of God will have no faces and no titles. They will be nobodies, anti-leaders, without impressive titles on their visiting cards; they will be frail and weak rather than powerful and overwhelming. They will clearly not be stars. They prefer to be known as a father rather than a leader, and be in broken agony about the lost rather than boasting shamelessly about their latest 'ministry victory' and about what God has achieved through them and their great programmes.

The new leaders will not be interested in control and power; they will be actively ignorant of their public image, deaf to the cheerful lures of worldly Christian fans wanting to elect their next King Saul, only to see them riding on a wave of human applause into spiritual oblivion, cashing in here on earth whatever awards God wanted to give them in heaven. But who listens to prophets? Have we not always stoned them in the name of good old tradition?

Three stages to becoming effective disciples

God's eyes are constantly searching for whom He can send. Once He finds somebody who is willing, He will guide them and gift them and bring them into relationships with the right people. I have observed the following three stages through which a person usually goes in order to become an effective disciple and then an effective discipler.

1 Spiritual spring-cleaning

People are sinners and need to repent, repent of each known sin and have a clean past. Most people have not only sinned

but have been sinned against, through wrong and ill-treatment, hate, anger, jealousy etc. Here you may need inner healing and counselling to 'forgive those who have sinned against you, and bless those who have cursed you'. Redeem your relationship with your father or children, as I have tried to explain above. Accept as a God-given fact how, when and where you were born in the natural sense of the word. It is all in God's plan that you should be fat or thin, male or female, bright or not so bright, or from a Hindu or Christian or Muslim background. Thank God in detail for all he has invested in you so far. As a clear result, you will be able to say with the Psalmist: 'I am wonderfully made.' Thank God for your natural and acquired gifts and abilities: He did not teach you to swim in order to let you drown. Be reasonable in the core disciplines of Christianity and display fruits of the Spirit in a Christian's life: prayer, joy, peace, patience etc. Once you have a redeemed past, you will start to have a redeeming future. You will not have to carry traumas, wounds, hurts and other spiritual mortgages into your ministry life and hurt others. I call this phase 'spiritual spring-cleaning', the process of accepting and appropriating personally the salvation Jesus has given us, which cleanses us, as much as possible, from sin and the consequences of sin. It is just as in real life: when we have washed and brushed, and put on clean clothes, then we can go out in public.

2 Discovering spiritual gifts – the tools of the trade

Each Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12–14; Rom. 12) at the time when Jesus started to live within the believer through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8). These gifts are supernatural empowerment from God, the tools of the trade for Christians, necessary to be a useful team member with a master-builder. A certain number of Christians are then gifted and called in a special way and

develop into one of the five equipping ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. They stop just having a gift, and start becoming one. There are three ways to discover spiritual gifts:

- a. *'By their fruits will you know them'*: in the context of ministry and church life, believers can help each other identify their area of spiritual giftedness by tasting and telling about each other's fruits.
- b. *Spiritual gift analysis*: appropriate tools and tests such as spiritual gift tests are available in most nations.
- c. *Prophetic ministry*: prophetic people often can 'see' the area of people's giftedness. In this case, associate yourself with a person who is years and miles ahead within the ministry area in which God has gifted you. Carry their bags, learn from them; if possible live with this person, and rub off as much as you can, by asking question after question. Be their disciple.

3 *Spiritual apprenticeship: practical, specialized training*

Be trained for a few days, months or years in relationship with and under the supervision of someone more experienced than yourself, preferably someone in the very area of your own ministry calling. In this way, prophets would train junior prophets, apostles junior apostles, mature evangelists junior evangelists and so on. The apprentices would carry the bags for their masters, pour water over their hands, live with them, see how they function. Instead of idol-worshipping 'a holy man' at a distance, they would get to know a person of God and learn from them in real life. Spiritual superstars and unapproachable giants in 'a class of their own' have done more to prevent others discovering their own giftings and callings than many may realise. If you learn from a person who has the same gifting and a similar calling to your own, your

learning curve will be phenomenal: you will learn in the very area of your giftedness, which will be exciting, and you will also dictate the speed of learning – your learning curve will be as steep and as fast as you come up with really good questions.

This should all be carried out in the natural and healthy context of house churches. Training should not necessarily be an 'out-of-body experience'. As house-church planting establishes and multiplies new groups of believers in homes, the best way to be trained to do this is to see it working at first hand, to get infected with the pattern, so we can reproduce it wherever we go.

Time and finances

Many people ask when they should 'come forward for ministry', as we say in Asia, and who will pay the bills. I have room here only to answer briefly: you come when you know you are called, and what God orders, He pays for.

The problems often begin with a nation's whole educational system. It is usually geared towards preparing a person for a place in the economic work structure of the world, from which, in more ways than one, God wants to save us. One pastor recently put it like this: the most crucial years of youth are spent – or shall we say sacrificed? – on the altar of education, with the parents pouring the fuel on the fire. As a result, many people only think of being disciplined in their late twenties, and then think back to the many 'lost years' earning degrees they never needed anyway. God is able to provide for those who serve Him wholeheartedly. Those to whom you minister will be empowered by God to empower you, including financially. One or two

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house churches of 15 people each can easily finance one full-time Christian in the West, and between five and ten house churches can finance a full-time prophet, evangelist, apostle or pastor in the rest of the world. You will experience the promise contained in Matthew 6:33 first hand as you go in faith and make your first steps.

