

6

Strangely Warmed

JOHN WESLEY, WHO profoundly impacted eighteenth-century life in America and from whom the Methodist denomination emerged, stated that he felt his heart at one point “strangely warmed” as he placed his full trust in Jesus Christ.

For myself, there came a time in my late twenties when God, in his grace, broke through the doubts I’d had for so many years. It really wasn’t my doing, other than a willingness to make room for him. Nor was it based on my getting my act together—getting all scrubbed up so I could be somehow “good enough” to be acceptable. Rather, God himself took the initiative—almost as if he were extending his hand in love to me.

I’m sure there had been other such occasions—times when God had tried to draw me to himself. But finally I accepted his initiative, laying down my fears and reservations. Where I had resisted before, I was now more open to a relationship with him.

In effect, I simply said, “Lord, I trust you, and I want to be fully yours.” I thought, *How amazingly patient he has been!*

This must have been what John Wesley meant when he spoke of being strangely warmed. It seems there was a point for him—and now for me—when a very special transaction took place. To my limited understanding it was ill-defined, but to God I believe it was quite specific. I realized I was no longer a casual acquaintance, living in a distant country. In a wonderful way I had become one of his—as though I had become a member of his household, part of a new family. A decades-long process had culminated. A critical piece of a life-sized jigsaw puzzle had been set in place.

It is hard to put into words what I felt at the time, but it was like a struggle that had finally ended. Like the quiet following a thunderstorm. Like a small child, suffering from a fever, who falls off to sleep in its mother’s arms, then wakes up well. I relaxed and smiled more easily. People noticed it! There was now an inner joy that went beyond just being happy. It was a sense of wholeness and assurance.

Thinking back, I realized I had judged my college friend Dave, and later the evangelist, unfairly. At the time, the package they had presented was not appealing, requiring a step of faith into the unknown—beyond that which I could see with my eyes or fully understand with my mind.

But they possessed and offered me a kernel of priceless truth: that the way into a full relationship with God comes through a type of death—giving up our hold on our own lives and our old way of living—and then rebirth, accepting a new life offered to

us by Jesus Christ. I concluded this was what they meant by that strange phrase *born again*. It was not a physical thing but a spiritual one.

Whose Business?

My everyday life was different now. Initially I didn't give much thought to the implications this pivotal step toward God would have for my work. I was, frankly, caught up in all that was taking place in me spiritually.

In time, however, practical questions began crossing my mind, not unlike questions that had occurred earlier. *Is my involvement in business truly my calling, or is it more a matter of personal preference? Should I be thinking about some more direct form of ministry?* I wanted to have these important issues resolved, and so I determined to make them a matter of prayer.

Answers weren't immediate. But after several months, and to my surprise, I sensed it was I who was being asked a very key question: Would I be willing to completely release my involvement in the company and follow a very different direction in life?

Wow! I really didn't want to hear that question. I put forth my best arguments for staying put—continuing the family heritage, providing for my mother and for the family, applying my technical and business expertise. But I concluded this wasn't a negotiating session. Instead, God was probing deep into my heart, examining my motives.

After a good deal of soul-searching, I responded to the query by making perhaps the most difficult decision I'd ever made—a decision to release to God my future and all that I owned,

including the company. In essence I said, “This business can’t be mine and yours at the same time. I don’t want to hold onto this or anything else unless you want me to. If you are asking me to forego this vocation and do something different, I’m willing—willing to trust you for the company’s future and mine, whatever that may be.”

What occurred as a result of that decision was a watershed.

Somehow it seemed God needed to know I was prepared to fully yield everything in my life, including my work, to him. The wonderful irony is that in return came the unmistakable assurance that I *was* where I belonged—in business. It was as if God were saying to me, “John, I needed to know you were willing to follow me, whatever, wherever. But you are where I want you to be. I have called you to business.”

I couldn’t recall a time when I’d had a greater sense of his affirmation and peace.

The Faith Connection

This experience, my releasing everything to God and then, in effect, his placing it back in my care, brought me into a whole new dimension of understanding of and commitment to my work. I was not out on a limb by myself, hoping I was doing the right thing. Instead, I had a greater sense of correctness and purpose than ever before—that I should, in fact, be doing just what I was doing. Gone were the doubts that I was missing God’s highest for my life!

And yet, a troublesome issue emerged: How should I relate my faith to my work? As I looked about, I saw very little evidence

that people of faith were carrying their faith into their work. Their two worlds were disconnected. To be honest, I had to admit I was no different. Sundays were Sundays, with the rest of the week largely detached, operating by a different set of rules. *Can these two worlds that seem so separate ever merge?* I wondered. Little did I realize what a key question that was, and how much the answer has been mangled in modern society.