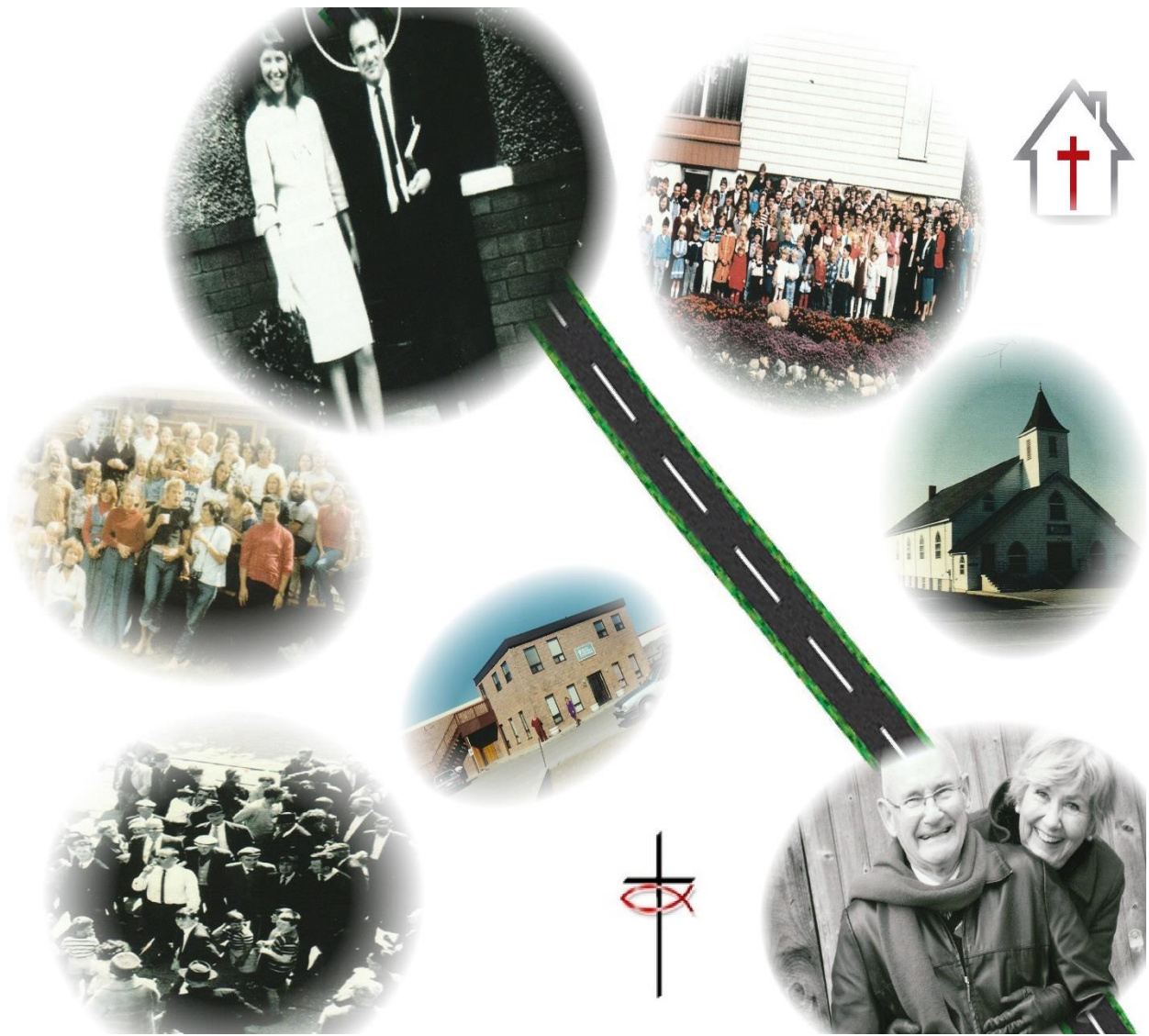


SECRETS TO PIONEERING THE 20TH CENTURY CHURCH



**By Pastor Ian
Wilson**

Several times over the past 50 or so years, I have been involved in the exciting adventures of pioneering a church or reviving those that had decayed to the point of closure.

I had only been a Christian for a matter of a month or so when I realized that my 'mother' church of England could not sustain or nourish my new-found faith in Christ. I was living in an industrial and mining town in the North of England and the year was 1962. In February of that year, I had had a Damascus Road Experience with Jesus Christ while attending Bede College in Durham City. This was no gentle awakening. It was a blinding, life changing God encounter which left me with only one desire and that was to serve Christ wherever He led me. There was a man living in my town called Bill Healey. He was known as the Singing Garbage Man and it was Bill who introduced me to his church. It was a Pentecostal Assembly that had been established after revivals led by Stephen Jefferies and Smith Wigglesworth. They met in a rickety building that had once belonged to a Baptist church. The top floor had been sealed off and was the home for a flock of pigeons, but on the lower floor were organs, pews and a congregation of 25 to 30 saints. It was here that, week by week on Sundays, I enjoyed the Presence of God and the fellowship of these large-hearted saints who were filled with the Holy Ghost and the love of God. There was one young man in the congregation, wonderfully gifted with music and as passionate as I was to see revival come to our city. Together, along with another earnest brother, we set about witnessing and preaching the word, sometimes giving out tracts. Sometimes preaching on street corners or doing kids meetings in the park. This was my early training ground.

It was here that I attended my first all night prayer meeting, here that I first gave my testimony, here I was baptized in water, here I first spoke in tongues and interpreted, here I preached my first message, here that I first saw God at work bringing in dozens of young people to hear the Word of God. All was action and excitement.

But it was here that I first was given an insight into the paralysing nature of church beaurocracy. The resources that could have been and should have been used for new open air sound equipment were directed to curtains and carpet for a new church building. It was here that I saw the pastor's wife stifle a budding revival by not keeping her word to sixty young people, who were told they would be given refreshments every time their youth meeting assembled. The promise was good when there were only twenty, but the church budget could not extend to sixty. So, the promise was not kept. I learned a lesson here that was life long. If you said it,

you said it and keep your word. When the revival in this church faltered, I left the area to go to Liverpool. I arrived in 1966 at a crucial moment. I was teaching at the time but was invited to a meeting at Hunter Street by the City Centre. There was a gathering of twelve people meeting in a Quaker Hall. The speaker that night was a man called George North. He pastored a church in Bradford, sixty miles away over in Yorkshire, the town where legendary Smith Wigglesworth came from.



Open air Preaching at the Pierhead, Liverpool

This man was superbly gifted and graced by God to unfold the scriptures. It was his second time in the city. I attended the weekly meeting for the next year and saw the original 12 people grow to eighty with a sense of revival in the atmosphere. These were the days of David Wilkerson who wrote the Cross and the Switchblade and had a special gift to reach the toughest and the farthest out.

A group of us launched an outreach meeting in a house in a rough district of the city called Queens Road. Several people put money together and bought a three-story house numbered 137. Revival and all good things happened behind the number on that door. From initial numbers of twenty meeting on a Sunday afternoon, within a year the house was packed out with young people (and this time there was no beaurocracy to stifle revival). Week by week, George North would preach and expound the word to eager listeners sat on the carpet and crowded up and down the stairs. Multitudes were saved, and the house became too small. In two years it was sold, and a larger house was bought on the other side of the city at 14 Devonshire Road. Walls were knocked down and the revival continued. It was around this time that I met my future wife Pauline. She was one of a group of girls that came up from a college in Crewe, fifty miles to the south. When we were married we joined with her brother David to help revive an ailing mission church in a suburb of Liverpool called Tuebrook.



On Sunday mornings about six of us would gather in an old mission building and preach the word to each other. God blessed our efforts and in the space of two years the Liverpool City Mission was able to send a full-time pastor to look after a congregation that now numbered thirty. ‘Can these dry bones live?’ was the question that was posed by God to Ezekiel. “Thou knowest” was his wise reply. Dry bones lived at Tuebrook Mission, but even drier bones awaited Pauline and I when we



moved to the Village of Parbold, thirty miles north of Liverpool. There was an old Anglican church perched on the hillside overlooking the village and it was there that Pauline and I headed when we arrived in town.

The Vicar was a middle-aged church of England prelate called Ray Probart. He was looking after a congregation of about twenty people on a Sunday morning and half that number for the evening service. Pauline and I were asking ourselves whether these dry Anglican bones could live. We set about working with Ray along with help from my brother-in-law Dave. Praise God, we found in Ray Probart a man who was ready, humble and teachable. In the next three years we held special evangelistic meetings and by the time we left for Canada, there was a congregation of two hundred meeting weekly at this church. Dry bones had lived.

In 1973, Pauline and I accepted a call to Barrie to help pioneer a small congregation of 4 families. They had been meeting for a couple of years in the Warnica School auditorium in Painswick. This was a hall that could hold 200 people, but the congregation had not grown above 12 in number. I soon found out that having this congregation come to life was a huge challenge. They were paying me \$50.00 a week to “hatch, match and dispatch”. I was also driving school bus and doing odd jobs for the joy of preaching to them.

After two years and battling the Canadian elements, a lethargic congregation and home sickness, we decided to head back to England. But then came a strange breakthrough. The man who came to buy my house got saved, pulled out of the deal and asked me if I would stay in Canada to teach him.

There it was.

I had already handed in my resignation at the Family Church. And now with my new convert, we began again, “Us four no more.” Pioneering from 1976 to 1993. This congregation grew through three buildings to number three hundred before I eventually, through a series of circumstances, left Barrie to travel the International circuit for the next ten years or so.



Currently Pauline and I, assisted by some excellent families are pioneering for the last time and in my 78th year, I am enjoying the challenge.

When we began to first work in Barrie, I was forced by circumstances to stay in Canada. I, as I have said, believed that God had sovereignly over-ruled me returning to England in the salvation of the man who was going to buy my house. That left me no other alternative but to stay where I was and begin to preach the Word.

Before our first meeting in the home of a brother living in the centre of this city, I read Acts Chapter 18, “Fear not, preach or teach. For I have much people living in this City”. That was a foundational word to my heart and I shared it with Pauline so that she would link her heart with mine in this great pioneering venture. Unless Pauline had embraced this word, I would have been unable to pursue or fulfill it. In this great calling of church planting, a man’s wife (if he is married), must be wholly on board with her husband, otherwise God will not be able to sanction the work with His fullest blessing. Although my wife is not a profile person, she fulfilled the **INDISPENSABLE** role of looking after the family and all things domestic so that

we could operate from a secure home-base. A man's calling must be wholly understood and accepted by his wife! Pauline has now pioneered with me for almost fifty years in one capacity or another and has been an unfailing support and helpmate. She has run ladies' meetings, bible studies, produced plays, helped in the development of children's programs, taught at our Christian school, helped in numerous



Christmas programs as well as being my personal confidant and secretary. In assisting me in the pioneering of churches and keeping the house Pauline did not do one or the other she did BOTH and, I must add, always managed to be well dressed while she did these things. When I travelled internationally Pauline arranged my flights and packed my cases. Rarely did she miss anything out even when I was gone for three months. If she came with me she could be called upon, sometimes at a moments notice, to speak to pastors' wives or groups of ladies and be ever ready to answer the many questions posed to her. When I was gone for weeks at a time Pauline simply looked after home base and did it well. Praise God. Maybe one day she will retire.

The 'calling' to begin and pioneer a church will be tested in every way. Hebrews chapter 12 says, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but heaven also that that which is unshakeable might remain". Guaranteed, that if a man (and his wife) feel the calling to pioneer a church, that calling will be tested and proved at every level in their lives. Let me address some of these testings.

Provision

Since I was not employed by any sending organization, or a member of a larger denomination, Pauline and I were dependent upon the Lord for our financial and material provision. If God's work done in God's way is assured of God's supply, then we had to prove it. There could be no faking it. When we first pioneered in Canada, I did odd jobs and preached without any salary. I worked in a safe making factory, a sawmill, drove truck and Pauline drove school bus; whatever it took to advance the Kingdom of God. What we could not provide for ourselves, God, Jehovah Jireh, supplied. We made tents and made the Gospel of no charge to our vast congregation, initially of six.

Running a Family While Pioneering a Church

Many are the instances of couples who have successfully engaged in the great mission of church planting and who have lived to see their children saved and also involved in the work.

E. Stanley Jones. The well-known missionary and author was at a missions conference. He saw a boy of 9 or 10 years old and asked him what his father did. The boy replied, “We reach at Troy”. Jones wrote a whole sermon on that reply.

“We preach at Troy”

In the boy’s mind what his parents did was what he and his sisters did. They were all involved in the work. It was a family business.

By the grace, wisdom and help of God, Pauline and I were able to find a harmony between parenting a family and Pastoring a church. My three key words in this regard are ‘Play’, ‘Stay’, and ‘Pray’ with your children.

When children are born, their world is filled with fantasy and imagination. They love to have fun. Realizing this, parents must play with them and enjoy the fun. The family home must be a FUN place not a theological seminary. It is their world and it is a play-learning world. In playing they are being introduced to the great lessons of life enacted through the drama of play. In play they learn to share, work as a team, to listen to the other person’s point of view, to give and receive and a whole range of interpersonal skills that last a lifetime. The play area of a child must be filled and satisfied, and a parent must enable that to happen, not only by buying toys, but by playing alongside the child.



They must also PRAY with their children. Who else is better suited and qualified to introduce a child to their loving Heavenly Father than a parent who is His earthly representative? Pauline and I taught our children to pray by praying with them in matters small and large and by showing

them how to thank God when their prayers were answered AND to keep believing when they were not.

The other word is STAY. We rarely farmed our children out to babysitters. Nor did we allow Hollywood to raise them in front of a T.V. We had a T.V. but had strict limits on how much was watched. Gadgets and smart phones were unheard of in those days. The chief and foremost influence on their lives were their parents. Mom and Dad were their role models, examples and heroes and, I do believe, we still are to this day.

Teamwork

In pioneering a church there is team work involved.

As people are gathered by the agency of the Holy Spirit, they come with differing gifts and abilities. I have always believed that a good leader will be able to recognize gifts and callings in believers and release them to exercise their gifts to their fullest extent.



When I first pioneered in Canada and we went through rapid growth, I lacked the gift of administration to see the numerical growth translated into cohesion. Pauline was an excellent secretary, but I lacked the management

skills to bring about structured growth to the congregation. Instead of a church we became a crowd.

I determined that if I should ever pioneer again, I would not repeat that mistake. I have a gift of leadership and communication that gathers people but in our present pioneering endeavour, I work alongside a man with great administration skill. Right from the earliest days, he has been taking care of much of the weekly care and building of church infrastructure, so that the Body of Christ develops bones.

In our present congregation we also have a brother who has advanced pulpit skills. He shares a good portion of the ministry with me and gives detail to some of my large picture preaching. Other gifts are at work and in a congregation of forty or so people nearly everyone is employed in one specific area or another.

Team work is essential. It is clear from the Book of Acts that the apostles worked with other brethren as co-labourers together in the kingdom.

The spiritual gifts are the power tools of church building. If they were indispensable in the Book of Acts, they must also be employed today.

As the senior Pastor I cannot be intimidated by other members operating gifts in the Holy Spirit. In fact, I must work to provide a forum for this to happen. If there are prophecies, tongues, words of knowledge, interpretations, gifts of healing exercised in the gatherings, I must rejoice, while at the same time ensure that order is maintained in the congregation. Then everything is done unto edifying and God's people are built up in their most Holy Faith.

Christianity is a supernatural event, not a religion. We should look for and expect the miraculous when we gather together; spiritual gifts are a manifestation of the Risen Christ in the midst.

In the scriptures, faith, gifts and callings all work in a mysterious and interchangeable combination.

Beyond the Four Walls

There must also be an expression beyond the four walls of wherever a congregation meets. If there is Jesus at work IN the house there must also be evidence of Jesus at work OUTSIDE the house. When I first pioneered in Barrie, we covered our city at least once with literature and also printed a newspaper that was sent out with the copies of the Barrie Advance. We held events in the park, open air meetings in the street, baptisms in the lake and I was also on a twice weekly T.V. program called Active Faith. In the midst of all this we ran a tent campaign on Lakeshore Drive, held men's meetings and in later years, opened a Christian school.

All of that translated into A LOT OF WORK. It is impossible to pioneer a church without HARD WORK. Wesley said, "at it, all at it, and always at it." He pioneered a movement and travelled thousands of miles through England, in the pursuit of it.

If we fill Barrie with our doctrine in the next few years and reach out to the ends of the earth and send people there to preach, we will have gone a long way to fulfilling our mandate.

Health

To do anything well a person must be healthy. To pioneer a church and preach the whole gospel of salvation and healing, you must be healthy and to remain healthy, you must resist the attacks of the devil at every level. All our family members; Pauline, our kids, myself experienced assaults and endured attacks of the devil. The

occasions are too numerous to recount when we prayed over our children, claimed the Blood of Christ over our house and stood on the promises of Jesus Christ for our health, protection and safety. All I can say fifty years later is that “Faithful is God who called us, who also did it” (1 Thessalonians 3:16) and we remain healthy to this day.

Accommodation

When a church grows (and it will if the Word of God is being preached and all things are done according to His pattern) then larger premises will be needed for a growing congregation. When our first congregation outgrew the house, we needed to enlarge our borders. There was a



millionaire business man who lived five minutes drive away from my house. He lived on forty acres of land with a barn on the property. God miraculously removed a large mole from his face, saved his soul and then moved upon his heart to donate his barn for the preaching of the Word. The renovations cost fifty or sixty thousand dollars (over \$300,000.00 in today’s money). When Ray was saved, he was a fish with a drachma in his mouth. Later, when we could no longer fit our congregation in the barn (we were 150 in number), we were able to move to a church building that held 250 and later to a warehouse that held 400.



I believe that if the gospel is faithfully and fully preached then the Lord will provide a premises where His family can gather for fellowship, prayer and the preaching of the Word.

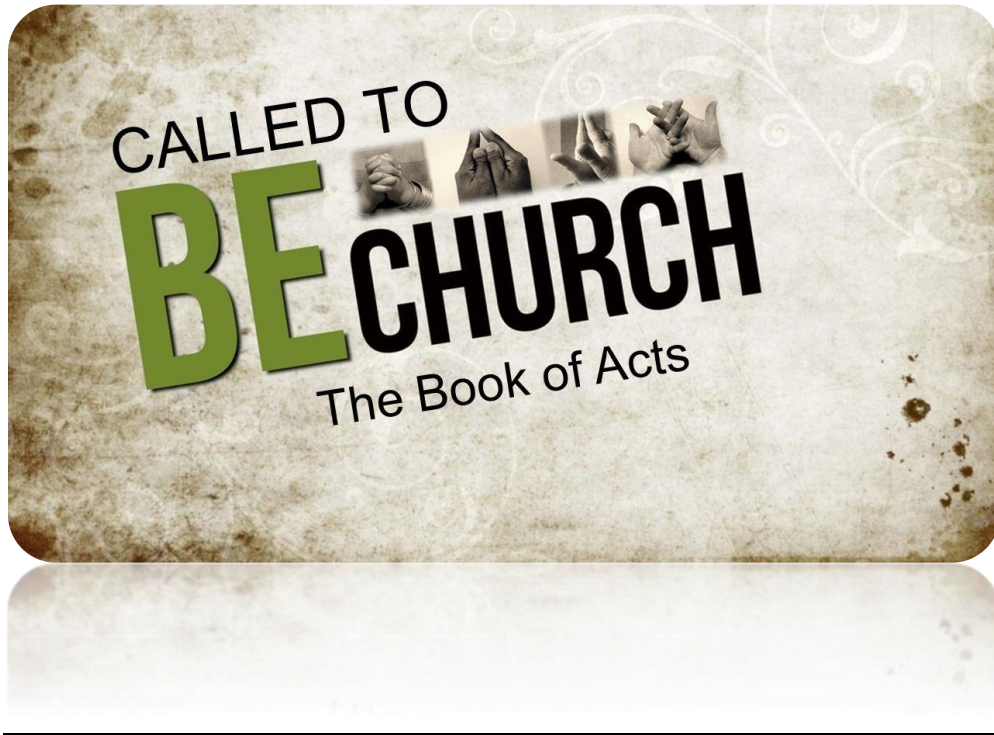
Transportation

This is an area in which we were constantly tested. Pauline and I had a variety of vehicles in our first twenty years in Canada. We knew nothing of a Canadian winter. Coming from England we were like babes in the woods. I learned very quickly back in 1974 that a reliable vehicle with a working heater is essential to function in the work of

God. I don't want to go into the story of our vehicles. Their dramas would fill a whole volume in themselves.

Currently, Pauline and I drive Mazda cars, but the genological tree supporting them is wide, wild and varied. We have driven cars from the sixties almost twenty-five feet long, cars held together with bondo, cars that almost use as much oil as gasoline, cars with friendly fenders and not so friendly fumes, and cars that had to be towed to the junk yard for their final lap. BUT, in and through it all God ALWAYS got us to where we needed to be, never once in thousands of meetings did we fail to make it. Hallelujah!

Faith



In pioneering a church, the Book of Acts has been my source of inspiration and guidance. This 28 chapter book is set between the Gospels and the Epistles as a remarkable chronicle of church growth. Commonly titled the Acts of the Apostles, it could be more definitively called “Christ at work through His Apostles”. I have come to appreciate this book, probably penned by Luke, as an unflinching source of instruction and guidance in church planting. As we open the Book in its first chapter, we see a group of ‘Rookie’ believers still bewildered by the recent turn of events in Jerusalem with their resurrected Master about to take His leave of them and return to the Father in heaven. He does not leave them alone. According to His promise, given in John 15:16, He is going to send His Holy Spirit who will show them EXACTLY what they ought to do. His final instruction is to go to Jerusalem, wait for Power from on High, and then begin to preach the word. Then the Master ascended back to heaven in front of their wondering gaze.

Sounds marvellously simple – and it was, because in the next chapter, the Holy Ghost descended upon them all in the upper room and the work immediately began as they went out to preach the Word. As we continue reading through the Book of Acts, several keywords come to mind that are incredibly relevant for any believers involved in church planting two thousand years later. Think of some of these words;

Power, Holy Ghost, preaching, teaching, prayer, faith, opposition, “team”, giving, visions, gifts, angels, healings, fellowship. Most of these are ‘doing’ words and rightly so since this history is called the Book of Acts.

These men and women, who had formerly been timid, erratic and doubtful, had now been transformed into powerful believers; empowered by common faith. I have come to believe that FAITH is a key word in the work of church planting.



All Christians live at certain faith levels but to engage in pioneering churches in Canada in 2017, in a post Christian, sceptical age, requires a special God-given faith. Faith to see what other believers don't, faith to endure when there are no visible results, faith to believe that God will supply all necessary means in terms of finance, accommodations, other team members, musicians, protection and material necessities.

To successfully pastor or govern an existing church is an exacting task, but to pioneer a church without the assistance of a denominational H.Q. or salaries and manpower supplied by a large, sending mother church requires something extra from heaven – in other words God - given Faith.

My final word is to do with the secret element of all success in God's work. It is the quality of perseverance. If the devil has one characteristic that I have applauded it is persistence. He never gives up, he is constant in his mission to disrupt, delay or subvert the work of God. This being so, those that are on the front line in advancing God's kingdom purposes must learn to persevere. There are discouraging things that happen when we set out to pioneer a new church. People let us down – we persevere. There is moral failure in one of our workers. We don't scrap the project, we persevere. There are meetings that go 'sideways', we learn from the experience and go forward. Our song leader takes a paid position in another church, we persevere and go forward with a reduced team, believing for new members, there is a break in at the building and stuff is stolen, we assess and go forward.

Always forward, always onward, persevering and believing God who is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him.



I cannot stress enough the needed quality of persistence in the great work of church pioneering. Once I was preaching in a suburb of Manchester England. There was a fine pastor of the host church and he invited our team to his house. On the wall of one of the rooms was proudly displayed his family motto on a large shield. It read **BE RIGHT AND PERSIST**. If it was right for you to begin a work in the Will of God, then **PERSIST** and in due season you will reap if you faint not.