



## Hearts Set on Pilgrimage

By Jonathan Hunter

*I hope you read the reprint in this issue of my 1990 article "Through the Valley of Baca". I think the words are as relevant today as they were fourteen years ago. I went over some of my journal entries from subsequent years and, not surprisingly, the reoccurring themes centered around the same cry for more incarnational ministry. I include here an excerpt from the devotional I have been using of late, Streams in the Desert by L. B. Cowan, which is evocative of that desire. From the Sept. 27th entry:*

"Divine healing is actually divine life. It is the lordship of Christ over the body- or the life of Christ in the framework of the human body. It is the union of the parts of our bodies with His very body, exhibiting His life flowing throughout our bodies. It is as real as His risen and glorified body. And it is as reasonable as the fact that He was raised from the dead, is a living person with an actual body, and sits today as an understanding soul at God's right hand." (A. B. Simpson)

"Exhibiting His life" will remain a lifetime theme for every God-seeker until (s)he is fully realized in heaven or "Zion" ( Psalm 84). The Christ we exhibit in our ministries along the way is what makes the "cities", the homes we visit, "a place springs." This is the ministry of Presence. Today, Embracing Life touches more lives with Christ than we could have ever imagined back in 1990; we do so by equipping people with tools to maintain the "springs" long after we've passed through.

In the last ten years, Embracing Life has evolved from a localized outreach to an international one. The publication of the Embracing Life Series (ELS) has made it possible. The printing of ELS has permitted us to place tools of encouragement into the hands of hundreds of people with life-defining illnesses throughout the United States and countries abroad. Next year we will have expanded our trainings to include ones in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The multiplication of these healing, discipleship groups is a tangible expression of Jesus' concern for hurting souls. The words contained in the ELS guidebook speak to their dilemma with a promise: God wants the sick to experience more life, not destruction (John 10: 10,11).

When the "Valley of Baca" article first appeared, the national AIDS picture was still pretty bleak. The number of annual deaths was continuing to increase exponentially. Drug treatment was simplistic and inadequate; the life spans of HIV-infected persons were presumed to be short. All that has changed, however, in the intervening years: effective drug combinations are available and more numerous. In turn, lives are prolonged, which produces renewed hope for thousands.

This good news, though, is reserved for First World nations. Grim statistics and worsening conditions are concentrated in the poorer nations- most notably in Africa. Unable to afford the expensive treatments that Western countries have available, sub-Saharan nations are fiscally crumbling as their populations die off from AIDS. Twenty-five million cases of AIDS have been reported in that

region alone! A recent e-mail we received from Zambia gives a more personal, familial picture of the devastation:

"We just had a case of a family of seven children whose middle generation has completely vanished as a result of the death of the last of the seven in our hospital last week--all of AIDS. And some of their children have also died. So we are left with the grandparents and some grandchildren! The social impact is terrible."

Sufficient medical relief for these ones is nowhere on the horizon. For Desert Stream, the challenge will be the contextualization of ELS for Africa and its cultures. How do we make Embracing Life affordable and available for a people unable to afford continuous treatment of one drug, much less combinations of them?

The horrendous situation in Africa does not mean that concerns are over for North America and Europe. There still isn't a medical cure. What continues to be at stake there, as elsewhere, are souls mired in spiritual ignorance and complacency. For these conditions, no amount of drugs or treatment can substitute for God. Only the ministry of Christ's Presence will do.

This winter we will visit South Africa--the first time for me. It will be an exploratory trip of sorts. We go facing a profoundly bleak condition that only Sovereign action can remedy. The challenge that awaits us there reminds me of the future I faced the day I found out I was infected with HIV. Then, as now, the Lord's words to St. Paul come to mind: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor 12:9).

Our ministry has always sought to be that psalmist's "place of springs" wherever we go. Ten years ago, we couldn't anticipate our pilgrimage would take us so far and wide. We are learning to discern the tracks of Another who has gone before us. "He is the first fruits, the 'pioneer of life'. He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because he has done so." (C.S. Lewis, Miracles)

Personal freedom from the spirit of death has been a gift beyond measure from the Lord. Enabling others to experience the same liberation stokes the fire in my soul for the journey ahead. As always, I want to thank you for encouraging the ministry and me to continue on with boldness. You have enabled us to go "from strength to strength". Onward to Zion.