



A High Altitude Look at the Christian Life.

LIFE ON WINGS

by
**ERN
BAXTER**

Since the beginning of man's record of himself, the challenge of flight has captured his imagination. The conquering of the air in our own generation has produced a wave of awe and romance unequalled in the annals of man's existence. Somehow the ability to fly has epitomized the longing of man to rise above the natural limitations of earthbound mortals and soar into the realm of the supernatural.

The spiritual longing of the world, the rise in the occult and mystic practices, are the evidence of humanity's hunger to know and move in the spiritual universe. Our world has become a spiritual vacuum, and man is dying of spiritual suffocation. God has made provision in His Kingdom for man to have this spiritual need met, and yet how few believers ever find the satisfaction of knowing fully what God has allotted to them.

How can a man break into the realm of the supernatural in his walk with

God? In one form or another this question seems to be one of the pressing concerns wherever I travel. We *talk* about what God is doing – but *living* in that divine presence is another matter. Rather than embarking on a heavy dissertation, I want to use a beautiful illustration thought up by the Author of the Word of God – the Holy Spirit.

(28) Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding.

(29) He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

(30) Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

(31) But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28–31)

The Bible is an intensely practical book. The Holy Spirit has ransacked the universe for every conceivable image, illustration, and parable to impart the truth of the ways of God to man. Daily activities, interpersonal relationships, the things of nature, and the parts of our bodies; things with which we are intimately acquainted, are captured by Him to describe some aspect of the divine mystery.

THE EAGLE

This passage speaks of the eagle. As the lion is the king of the beasts, so the eagle is the king of birds. The Holy Spirit has likened us and our God-ward aspirations to the aspiration of being like the eagle.

As I watched the eagles in the Columbia Basin near Portland, I began to understand why they have represented throughout time the God-ward thrust of man: power – freedom – beauty – the lord of his environment through his ability to master the air. They move in regal splendor, for they are born as kings. As the eagle is born with the divine right of kingship, so we

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come from the new birth with the inherent potential of soaring into the very presence of God, Himself. The fact, however, that eagles are so equipped, does not necessarily mean that they will ever get off the ground.

Deuteronomy 32:11 has some interesting information about eagles:

As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings to catch them, bearing them on its pinions.

All eagles begin as eaglets and before these unseen:ly, squalling fledglings take their place with royalty, they must be trained in the ways of the king of birds. This little verse is the Flight Training Manuel of student eagles and earthbound Christians.

Picture with me two little eaglets snuggled cozily in a down-filled nest, high on an eerie ledge on some remote mountainside. (Christians often find themselves born into equally precarious circumstances.) Everything is just wonderful; mother eagle sallies forth daily and brings back choice tidbits for those ravenous appetites. During the cold, mountain nights she settles over the nest and the eaglets snuggle securely under those warm, soft wings and look out at the stars not very far away. They are newly born and baptized in the Spirit. Hallelujah!! Life is wonderful and being a Christian sure makes life easy — no more problems! God knew what He was doing when He thought up this arrangement!

One day Mom begins to act very strange. Rather than landing on the nest she hovers momentarily, beating the air with those great wings. As Junior watches her, he thinks, "Mom sure has powerful wings!" That is exactly what Mrs. Eagle wants Junior to know.

Then she does something downright crazy. She grabs a piece of the nest and drops it over the side of the cliff. Then she returns for another chunk, and another, and another. The little eaglets are beginning to think Mom has lost her marbles! By now the framework of the nest is pretty shaky and that nice soft down that made Junior feel so secure is at the bottom of the canyon. Nest life is becoming a standing-room-only situation on what is left of their home.

Can you see what the mother eagle is doing? She is preparing her young for the first stage in eagle training. After our Lord received the Holy Spirit and the declaration of His holy Sonship, the Scripture says that He was *led of the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. I have written in the margin of my Bible at this point, "Is this standard operating procedure?" I believe that God's *modus operandi* is to begin to confront us as soon as possible with the necessity of maturing into something other than nest-bound believers.

Paul told the Corinthians that he could not talk to them as mature men because they were as babes. He did not say they *were* babies, but that they were *like* babies. When a baby slobbers its pabulum down its little chin and milk runs into its little ears, we all laugh and think it is cute. But when a twenty-one-year-old man slobbers his food down his chin, then he is *like* a baby and this is sickening. God does not mind a Christian going through the pabulum stage; it is a part of growing up. But it is tragic in God's eyes when we never grow out of infancy.

Interestingly enough, the discomfort of our bewildered eaglets has been deliberately caused by the one who loves them most. How often when we have a streak of trouble do we cry out, "The Devil is attacking me!" Are you positive it is the Devil? Maybe the One who loves you most is stirring up your nest.

Like many believers, the little eagles conclude that standing on that windy ledge is at least tolerable and they can

make the best of it. But dear old Mom has more in mind than just a nest stirring. She catches one of the little fellows in her powerful beak and nudges him toward the edge of the ledge. The poor little guy wonders what is happening now. His little heart is beating faster and faster, and as he is pushed closer to the edge he thinks, "NO, it can't be!" *But it is!*

With one final push he starts to plummet toward the bottom of the canyon — he is sure this is the end. Then out of nowhere there is a swoosh of Mom's mighty wings and Junior is heading for the safety of the ledge on her powerful back, quite relieved. The first time God kicks us out of the nest and catches us before we hit bottom, we gasp, "Oh, thank heaven! I was sure God had let me down that time."

Back on the ledge our would-be king is just getting over being dizzy when Mom starts pushing again. "Not again," he moans, as he starts his second tumble. "What if Mom doesn't make it this time?" But she does. Several trips later Junior begins to get the feeling that Mom is trying to get a point across. Between rides he suddenly remembers Mom's huge wings hovering over the nest. He looks at his own straggly wings and thinks, "I wonder if . . . If she does that again I'm going to give mine a try!" Rest assured he gets another chance. Mom will not stop until Junior finds the gumption to try his own wings.

Little eagles are gangly creatures, wobbling shakily on untested wings. But each desperate plunge brings a little more mastery of his wings. One day he spreads those wings and rather than falling, he finds himself rising up and up and up, riding the mighty air currents far above his ledge home and the nest that confined him. No longer a fledgling begging for tidbits, he is learning to become one of the eagles — he will be a king.

Ministers and evangelists often make becoming a Christian like being born on a satin pillow with a cordon of angels wafting us through life and depositing us at the foot of the celestial throne. Only after we are well settled in our nest do we learn that God

is more intent on the production of character than the provision of our comfort. We have made God our celestial Santa Claus and if we do not get everything we want we stomp saucy little feet and open our mouths and scream for the goodies. But because He is our Father, and not Santa Claus, He will box our saucy little ears and tell us to "hush up." He will not tolerate our spoiled ways, but will *force* us into situations that will *require* us to mature and learn to use the wings He gave us. He wants us to become eagles. God never built a nest you could walk out of — they are all designed to fly away from. Some Christians have been over the cliff so many times that they enjoy the ride and could care less about learning to fly. They will never get one inch higher than the nest where they were born.

KINGS

The Bible land knew two types of eagles: the Golden Eagle and the Imperial Eagle. The Golden Eagle speaks of us as partakers of the divine nature and the Imperial Eagle speaks of us as kings. In the Scripture, the two go hand in hand.

Our divine right is to reign as monarchs in our own lives! The circumstances which confound and befuddle the world become launching pads to new heights in God. Satan and his henchmen become the snakes which an eagle bisects with a slash of his mighty talons or drops from dizzy heights to be crushed on the rocks below. This is our inheritance.

Some years ago I was managing a campaign in Cleveland, Ohio. Upon departing the city for a few days, I told one of the committees, "Get a plot of ground where we can pitch a tent for about three thousand people and we will take care of the expenses later."

When I got off the plane upon my return, the chairman met me and said, "We have a wonderful place for the tent."

"Wonderful," I said. "How much did you have to pay for the land?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars a day."

"What!" I gasped. (Back in those

days fifteen hundred dollars was like fifteen thousand today.)

We had decided not to make a big thing of money, so there was little we could do but trust God. After the first day and a half we were five thousand dollars down — a rather awkward place to be.

That afternoon I preached on Romans 5:17: "We reign in life by one Christ . . ." As I finished I said, "Now as you meet one another for the next few days, address each other as 'King so-and-so.' You may address me as 'King Baxter.'"

That night I was handed an envelope addressed to "King Baxter." I opened it and read a delightful note: "Dear King Baxter, My wife and I have a feeling that our fellow king has a need. Out of our royal treasury we wish you to accept the enclosed check for \$5,000." I may not always have it, but there is money in the royal family.

MOUNTING UP ON WINGS

The writer of Proverbs said that among those mysteries of the universe which were too hard to understand, one was the "mystery of an eagle in the air." The symbolism of this passage is the Christian's inexplicable potential which is like the eagle's, who can fly higher than any other bird and never wiggle a wing. What do I mean by "wiggle a wing"?

Did you notice that the Psalmist said that eagles "mount up," and not "flap up"? Eagles were not made to go flapping about — they were created to soar high and free. Eagles learn to fly without struggling because they understand the air currents. An eagle will perch on a rock and wait, testing the winds. When the right wind is blowing he lifts into the air with a royal scream. Herein is one of the eagle's secrets in being able to mount up — waiting. Those that wait, says the Scripture, will be the ones to mount up. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength . . ." This is the key to public worship as well. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, and you know not from whence it comes

nor whither it goeth, so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." A Christian should fly without effort because he understands the secret of the winds.

I was once in a public worship service being led by a minister friend who had every natural gift for leading worship — voice, musical talent and personality. The worship was good, but it was not what the Spirit wanted. In the back of the auditorium a man kept raising his hand as if he wanted something quite urgent. Finally the pastor acknowledged him, "Yes, Brother." The man started singing a fine old chorus, "Glory and Honor . . ." All he wanted to do was get a chance to ride an air current that had been blowing on him for some time. That meeting took off and we rode that breeze of the Spirit all evening. There is a breeze in every meeting if we have the patience to wait for it. If we do not, then we join the crowd that says, "OK, let's whip it up, Come on, now . . ." No thanks, it is easier to soar than to flap!

HIGH FLIGHT

Something in an eagle demands he fly higher than all the other birds. He often flies well beyond the view of the naked eye.

He rises past the crows on the telephone wires who screech, "Cawwww, Cawwww, stop and we'll give you the latest on the Sunday school superintendent, Cawwww, Cawwww."

But the eagle calls back, "I'm not interested! I'm going up beyond the clouds where I can look full into the face of the sun."

Even though an eagle flies high into the blinding sun, he is equally adapted to dark mountain valleys. He has two sets of eyelids. With his earthly eyelids he can see perfectly well at ground level, or he can roll down his heavenly ones and play in the glaring glory of the sun.

Christians must know how to walk on the earth as well as fly in the glory. It is possible to become so spiritual that we cannot see reality in our daily lives. Never become so spiritual that you will not provide for your family,

love your wife, play ball with the kids or take out the garbage.

"Take out the garbage! I'm a son of God!" you may object.

Friend, with what dignity a son of God can take out the garbage!

As the eagle mounts high above the clouds, he sails those great air currents into the very presence of God. You I are not fashioned for the dirt and pollution. We were not born to be dirty crows on a telephone line. We are appointed to the pure worship of God, to climb into the rare atmosphere of the Holy of Holies.

Some ask, "How far can I go, Baxter?"

"*Enoch walked with God and was not because God took him.*" That eagle flew high! One day he flew so high that God said, "Enoch, it is closer for you to come on up than to go back."

How high? A wonderful man of my congregation, whose job it is to care for beautiful, prize-winning horses, drew me aside after the service one morning. He was a very timid and gentle man; he spoke apologetically as he said, "Pastor, one of the horses in my charge is very sick and not expected to live. Do you think . . ." his voice trailed off before he finished.

"You wonder if I believe God can heal your horse, don't you?" I asked.

He admitted that that was what he wanted to know.

"Do you believe that He can?" I questioned.

"Yes, Pastor, I do." he answered.

I took his hands and together we asked God to reach out and heal that horse.

I am one of the few pastors that I know who has a picture of a horse hanging on his wall. People can tell me, "I don't believe that God heals horses!" They can let their horses die — God healed this one.

How high? George Mueller was once told by a captain of a ship on which he was a passenger that the ship could not make New York on schedule because of a dense fog that had set in. "We'll see about that," said George Mueller. As George Mueller prayed the fog lifted and the boat hastened toward

his waiting appointment in New York.

People can say, "I don't believe that God lifts fogs!" They will stay in a fog, but God lifts fogs for people that have the faith to have fogs lifted.

God has made us eagles like Himself and He wants us to fly! All the experiences which we become so excited about — our conversion, our baptism in the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gifts — are but a part of our introduction to the supernatural life that demands us to become God-like because we are partakers of the divine nature.

The eagle is purposed for the high places — Obadiah 4 states that it sets its nest "among the stars." If we find ourselves unhappy and frustrated, if Christianity does not become what we hoped, then it may be that we have not comprehended God's calling to nest high. We are created to live in a divine atmosphere, and we will die if we dwell in a polluted world.

How high? My answer: How well do you understand the air currents? How thoroughly do you know the moving of the Spirit of God? Perceiving the Spirit of God is more than a subjective feeling. It is minding the things of the Spirit. It is right conduct, obedience to the Word of God, knowing the will of God and doing it. The Spirit and Word are inseparable. If you do not allow the Word of God to rule your life, but allow sin into your life, then you cancel your ability to ride the air currents. You have become a flapper. You may shout louder and LOUDER, sing harder and HARDER, pray longer and LONGER; but you will not rise an inch, you are flapping your wings in dead air.

NECESSITY OF FREEDOM

An eagle free in his natural habitat is a very clean bird. If, however, he is placed in captivity he becomes one of the dirtiest birds in the world. In like manner, a Christian who has become captive and lost the freedom of the Spirit of God, will become "a dirty bird." Do you know what the deepest bondage is a Christian can fall into? Allowing himself to digress into religious forms which are not accord-

ing to the Word of God. Religious bondage is not just ecclesiastical ceremony, it is most often that which was once full of life but is now part of "the way we do things." It is God confined to your system. "Stand fast in the liberty with which Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." Paul was speaking of the bondage of religious form. The wine of the Spirit is always new, and if we try to place it in old wineskins, the skins will burst, and both will be lost. In all the world there is nothing more cruel and dead than a bunch of religious people who have lost the anointing.

What is there left after the anointing departs? We are told in II Kings 6 that in the siege of Samaria that all the people had left to eat was asses' heads and doves' dung. It is not very pretty is it? This is God's view of what remains after His anointing is gone. Asses' heads typify human wisdom without God, and doves' dung is all that is left after a dove flies away.

When you come into the presence of God, you can rest assured that it will not be because of your PhD, or because you have memorized the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. We come to live in the presence of God by knowing the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. Understanding the movement of the winds is the only way we will ever find the altitude to dwell in the presence of God. It makes no difference if you are a Doctor of Philosophy, or a garbage collector, you stand on equal footing in God's economy. Can you understand what I am saying? Otherwise Christianity is reduced to a philosophical system that is likened to asses' heads. It is merely human wisdom without divine content. Twenty-eight hundred times in Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, he says, "*Let us assume.*" This is human wisdom without divine content.

Doves' dung represents what is left after the Holy Spirit has departed. All over the world and in every segment of religious life we find edifices, remembrances, and practices that serve as monuments to a time when the Holy

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Spirit brooded in divine presence, dispensing His beautiful gifts. The Holy Spirit was forced out — He was unwanted because He threatened the structure of ambitious ecclesiastics. But when He was gone, the forms had to be maintained for the people's sake. The Pharisees wanted to keep the form, but not Jesus; He was too unpredictable and disruptive.

Many of the rites and ceremonies in the traditional church are what is left of something that was once spontaneous and full of life.

Often when I am under a strong anointing I will begin to chant my message. Once in a service in Phoenix I came under an unusual anointing and began to chant. After the service a young Greek Orthodox English Professor from the University of Arizona rushed up and began to greet and hug me after the custom of a Middle Easterner, saying, "My Brother, where did you learn the Gregorian chant?"

"The what?" I asked.

"The Gregorian chant," he insisted. "I know priests who have studied it for years trying to master it as well as you have."

A little bewildered and embarrassed I had to admit that I was not even sure what the Gregorian chant was.

"Then where did it come from?" he questioned.

"Oh, I think I *can* tell you that," I answered. What had once been done quite naturally under the anointing of the Spirit of God was now carried on as part of a church rite, void of the spontaneity of the Spirit. I do not mean any of these things disrespectfully, but at one time when hands were laid on heads for confirmation and the words were uttered, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," something happened. Now, it often is empty hands on empty heads. It is the tragedy of doves' dung. All we have left is a memory of a beautiful bird. The Christian must know the freedom to ride the wind into the face of the sun.

WHEN EAGLES DIE

Every eagle will have his down time.

He may be sick or molting, but he never panics. He finds a rock and sits there letting the healing power of the sun do its work. If you find a low place in your life, do not start running around trying to find God — for the people will say to you, "Here is Christ, there is Christ," and it will bring frustration. David said, "I waited patiently on the Lord." God often has a work to do and all we are asked to do is wait. There will again come a time of mounting up on wings, but the waiting must come first.

Every eagle knows when his time for death has come. He finds a high rock where he can watch the setting sun and settles down to wait, and then dies watching the sun.

There is only one picture on my study wall and it is that of my saintly, maternal grandmother. As a very young child Grandma took over much of my rearing. My earliest memories are that of toddling up to the picturesque little picket fence in front of her home on a Saturday morning looking forward to all the delicious smelling goodies that she took from the cavernous depths of her vast old-fashioned oven. How I loved her.

Because of the religious confusion that was in our home, I walked in rebellion as a teenager, but Grandma never let go of me. She was living in our home by that time, and I can remember well stumbling into the house at three or four o'clock in the morning and seeing her light shining under the door. I could hear her sobbing, "Oh, God, oh God!" Even though I usually felt like kicking the door down, I knew that it meant something.

The time came when God got me. I had dissipated my life until I was a moral, physical and spiritual wreck, before He found me. Using what musical talent I had, I set out in the Lord's work and soon found myself in the ministry.

Grandma ended up moving with us to Vancouver where I had my first important charge. She came to every service and sat in the front row and just smiled at me. (I don't think she

ever heard a word I said.) She was saying, "You answered, Lord, you answered." She was nearly eighty and had the most beautiful white hair you ever saw.

Every day for four hours, Grandma would sit in her old rocker and rock out an anthem of praise and supplication to God for me. Her prayers sustained me in a way that I was to realize only after she was gone.

Grandma always lived alone — she was too independent to live with us. One day when I was visiting her for a meal she suddenly said, "I'm going home."

"Home?" I asked, "Home where?"

"I'm going home to be with the Lord," she replied like it was something quite ordinary.

"Oh, Grandma," I objected, "don't do that!"

"Yes," she insisted, as though she and the Lord had talked it over and it was all settled.

A little unsure of what to make of it, I asked, "What are you going to do?"

Quite positively she answered, "I am giving notice on my room, I will go back to the prairies to spend Christmas with the children, and then I am going home."

That is exactly what she did. With Christmas only three months away, she went back to the prairies for the holidays, wrote her Christmas cards and put everything in order. When she was ready she called all the children together and did all the decent things one does when one dies. She called for the pastor and had him read her favorite psalm (she was two verses ahead of him by memory) and told everyone good-bye. When she had attended to everything she turned her face toward the sun and slipped into the presence of God.

Grandma was an eagle. She died as eagles die, looking into the sun. Somehow I think this is how saints were meant to step into eternity.

There is great reward in God for those who will dare to be eagles and learn to soar into what God purposed us to be. 🕊