



Chapter 1

LIFE IN FAST FORWARD

The 20th Century: era of gadgets, glitter and grandeur; television, telephones and travel; cam-corders, computers and corruption; prosperity, progress and promiscuity. Who in the demure world of yesterday could ever have imagined that they would spawn such a generation: travel faster than sound; communication that circles the globe in seconds; technology so hot many products are obsolete by the time we get them home; life on the edge of outer space is ours. Unique in all of history, we stand.

Never before has life whirled at such a pace. Never before has the Christian Church faced the dilemma that challenges the daily existence of this generation: the volley of pressures, temptations and decisions; the frenzy; the affluence; the apathy. Yes, our place in history is unique. Our circumstances are unique. Our problems are unique.

With every aspect of life seemingly revved up to a heightened state of acceleration, it may not be surprising that many try to fit their Christian experience into this same frame of reference. Christians in record numbers flock to conferences, retreats, seminars and sessions in what seems like a frantic attempt to grab godliness on the run.

The Sword

Professionals lavish predigested teaching in mega-doses on ravenous appetites, while the faithful struggle to absorb as much as possible in the allotted time before rushing back to their whirlwind schedules.

As vehicles take off in a cloud of dust, one can almost hear the Gentle Shepherd calling after them, “Hey, wait for me!” I wonder, if we actually heard Him call, would we stop? Could we stop? Just how does the Gentle Shepherd fit into this Nuclear Age?

A Slower Pace

In another world, in another culture, perhaps even for the greater part, at another time, in sharp contrast to our scrambled existence are some who march to the beat of a different drum. In secluded woods on the outskirts of villages in Russia, live “holy” men known as “*poustinikki*” (*pou* - pronounced as in you; *poustinikki* - plural for *poustinik*). With deep roots in the tsarist era, they have survived the scourge of communism and are reportedly still in existence even today.

In this far removed context there are those who, from all levels of the social spectrum, have responded literally to the compelling challenge that Jesus extended to the rich young man in Matthew 19:21:

*“...go, sell your possessions and give to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven. Then
come, follow Me.”*

Even Tsar Alexander I is thought by many to have entered a poustinia (home of the poustinik). Great mystery

surrounds his many years of absence.

Answering the call, a poustinik distributes his earthly wealth to the poor and leaves friends and family to embark on a life of solitude, service and prayer. A simple ankle-length robe tied with a cord at the waist is his usual summertime attire, and he takes only a linen bag containing a loaf of bread, some salt, one book, a Bible, and a gourd of water.

The poustinik usually occupies a deserted hut on the edge of a village, or one built with the help of villagers who always welcome his presence. He usually plants a vegetable garden, fishes in a river or stream, cuts wood for his stove to keep warm in winter and tries to earn a living. He also does such things as weaving baskets to give to those in need. His door is latched only against the wind. Anyone is welcomed day or night for whatever reason. What food he has is offered to his guests even though it may be only a piece of bread. Those needing help come to the poustinia for prayer, or counseling, or physical assistance, for any contribution he can make to their lives. Sometimes a poustinik spends weeks helping to gather in crops or whatever the need of the villagers might be, realizing that to serve his God is to serve his fellow man.

The only book in the poustinia is a Bible which the poustinik reads on his knees. Academic questions or profound analysis are of little interest to him. He often reads only a few sentences or a single page in a whole day and in long meditation permits the truth of the Word to take root in his heart.

Those who have known them say that poustinikki always radiate the quiet joy of the Lord. They maintain that a sad poustinik is not a true poustinik but is a hypocrite

and a liar. To them, eyes tell the story. Even though the face may be that of an old man (or woman) they say the eyes of a true poustinik are those of a child.

In her book, *Poustinia*, Catherine de Hueck Doherty tells about her father's experience with a close friend. Peter was a member of the nobility, the oldest son of an old Russian family, a millionaire by today's standards. One day he announced to Catherine's father, "Theodore, I have been reading the gospels and I have decided, as so many before me, to accept them literally."

He turned over his real estate to his family and proceeded to withdraw his bank accounts in coins of gold and silver. These he stuffed in sacks which he piled into a heavy horse drawn cart about the size of a 1 to 1½ ton truck. In the slums of Petrograd, the two of them distributed his wealth, family by family, house by house. When all was disbursed, Peter said, "And now I must go." Mrs. Doherty writes:

So they returned to his house where on his bed, there was laid out a linen tunic. He took a linen bag, a loaf of bread and in another little linen bag, he took some salt. He also had a gourd of water and a staff. On foot, my father walking with him, he went through the streets of Petrograd. My father accompanied him to the outskirts of the city and into the country roads. The last he saw of him was just a silhouette against the setting sun, a man in a long garment with a staff in his hand. He had no cash in his pockets (he had no pockets), nor in his bag. He had only some bread, water, salt and a staff. Not even shoes. That was all.*

Such complete abandonment of all the things we *couldn't live without* is hard for us to fathom. In our culture, such actions would be considered unnecessary, unwise and irrational. One thing, however, is very clear: the poustinik *put his money where his mouth was*. What he had of this world's goods he held loosely. He kept nothing back. He was ready at any time to relinquish anything and everything if he perceived this to be the Lord's will for him.

It's true, such a pristine existence does not lend itself to our culture, but is there just a little tug at your heart strings to experience a *quiet place* to meet with your Lord alone in your own private *poustinia*? Could it be that in order for us to survive the persistent surge of activity, the increasing wickedness and sensuous materialism, it is becoming ever more urgent for us to make room in our lives for such a place? Is our Lord running after you, longing for the moment when you will slow down long enough to meet with Him in a *quiet place*?

He has said to us:

Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

Perhaps you've tried, but your schedule is so crowded you can't ever fit it in. Or maybe you've experienced erratic success, but haven't been able to establish a pattern in your life. "Just how does one establish a 'calm oasis' in the midst of a chaotic existence?" you may ask.

Radical change in perspective and lifestyle does not spring *tra la* from mere desire. Desire is the beginning, but change must grow. And perhaps 21st Century change requires 21st Century perspective.

Your Personal Computer

In many ways we are like computers. We constantly feed data into the computer of our heart and mind. Nor is our biological computer ever turned off. Everything we see, everything we hear, everything we read, or say — basically everything we feed into our mind — goes into a memory bank to form our own personal database. And just as an electronic computer performs on the basis of what is fed into it, the database we have accumulated in our heart and mind predictably determines our attitude and actions.

Solomon said it:

...as (a man) thinks in his heart, so is he.... (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV)

What you spend your time thinking about is *you*. Your agenda and the direction of your life is determined by your thought life and the database you have established. It follows then that the place to defeat Satan is at the point of what we take into our minds and let our minds feed upon. We can't plant thistles and expect to grow daisies.

Satan is very aware of this. This is why he systematically works to control what we see, hear, read,

and think about, any communication that exposes us to his deception and perversion. He knows that if he can control the input of our computer, he can control our life.

One can hardly avoid the influence of magazines, newspapers, radio, TV — the ever present media which often seems bent on injecting corrupt and lewd thinking into every situation. To even watch or read the news frequently opens our minds and thoughts to unspeakable things committed by those who have inadvertently or even blatantly given themselves over to satanic ends. Commercials of innocuous products are often designed to induce lewd and lustful thinking.

To live and work in this world is to be exposed to satanic influence that can become so commonplace, so much a part of our lives, we may tend to just accept it as norm. We, as God's children, need to be aware that we are being systematically led down a "primrose path" of sinister evil and we must take conscious steps to resist and counteract this trend in our lives.

Solomon cautioned us:

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

Changing Your Data-Base

If you're having trouble keeping up with yourself and find that you have no time for the Lord or if you feel you're not growing spiritually the way you'd like to, perhaps you should check the data you're feeding into your computer. If you're not delighting in doing God's will, if

you see yourself constantly yielding ground to the enemy, it may be that you have become a victim of this world's secular agenda that has accumulated in your database and is controlling your life.

Consider for just a moment: What percentage of time do you spend thinking about Scripture and the things of the Lord versus the time you spend focused on the things of this world? Do you see any kind of balance between the two? In this world of sin and corruption, it isn't easy to avoid being completely swept away by the swirl of activity and the rationale of the great deceiver. But to progress spiritually we need to be aware of what is happening and to take definite steps to combat it.

When you hear teaching presented by others you may hear *about* God's Word and experience a challenge, encouragement, inspiration, blessings, and lots of warm "fuzzies". But, if you want to permanently change the direction of your life, it must grow from deeper roots. David knew this. Look at his comment in Psalm 40:8:

I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart. (KJV)

Why did David delight to do God's will? Was it merely a *desire* that translated into a holy life? Not according to this Scripture. David planned it. He fed the necessary data into his biological computer. Even though he obviously didn't know about computers, he knew the principle just the same. By memorizing God's Word, he was feeding unadulterated truth into the computer of his heart and mind. Thus it controlled his thinking and translated into the delight of living a righteous life. True,

David took a nose dive or two, but, even so, the Lord says of him:

“I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart.” (Acts 13:22)

I'd settle for that, wouldn't you?

Psalms 119:11 is a benchmark for Christians and you will find it referred to often in the pages of this book. The Psalmist's bold assertion does not assume alternatives:

I have hidden (God's) word in my heart that I might not sin against (Him).

Consider again: Why did the Psalmist hide God's word in his heart? He says it was because he wanted to live a godly life. He wanted victory over sin. So he applied the sure formula. He knew that by memorizing God's word, by hiding it in his heart, his desires and decisions would be pre-programmed. Both of these verses firmly attest to the fact that memorizing God's Word, hiding it in our hearts, translates into positive attitudes and godly actions.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I've memorized a few verses of Scripture here and there". Let me ask, what impact do they have on your daily life? What portion of your time do you spend thinking about them? Do those few verses counterbalance the world's endless barrage, designed to keep you focused on its agenda? Surely greater reservoirs of God's Word are needed. Although the idea of memorizing whole chapters and books of Scripture may seem overwhelming, many have

found it be a source of joy and power and, indeed, a life changing adventure.

In the words of one housewife and mother of four:

Memorizing Scripture opens our senses to the Lord, enabling us to hear His voice, know His character, see His blessings, feel His peace.

Before hiding God's Word in my heart, I worried about everything, speculated people's motives and overate using food as a comfort device. The Lord has dramatically changed my old struggles and shown me how to turn from evil and do good. His peace floods my soul.

After I read some booklets from *Sword of the Spirit Ministries*, the Holy Spirit helped me to memorize Colossians and James in a short time with great pleasure. If a scatter brained person like me can do it, anyone can. It inspired me to devour God's Word, feasting at His table while renewing my mind daily.

Having books memorized equips me to worship and meditate during traffic jams, long drives, while cleaning the house and in bed, when I'm too lazy to turn on the light.

This exciting approach to Scripture memory will revitalize your thought life and lifestyle. Watch how entertaining the Bible is as you let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you. He will help you accomplish what's critical by eliminating the trivial.

Memorizing Scripture is like opening a window in a musty room to feel the fresh breeze on your face.

If you're overwhelmed by the pace your life has taken; if you're finding that, despite your good intentions, the things of this world are gobbling up your time so that you have little or none left for the Lord; if your good resolutions are swept away with the pressures of the moment; if your honorable desires aren't translating into actions, then you're aware that the mere desire for change is not enough.

If you really want the focus of your life to change, the psalmists have given you the formula. You must program it into your computer. You must hide God's word in your heart, feed His pure, unadulterated truth into the computer of your heart and mind by *memorizing the Scriptures*. This is the powerful antidote that will counteract the materialistic, ungodly input that constantly bombards our lives, an influence designed to render us as puppets in the hands of our great adversary.

Your Own Private Poustinia

In his serene, unhurried world, the poustinik spent hours and days on his knees meditating on Scripture. This luxury seems foreign to our existence, but we can have this same, constant input from God's Word in our life. When we store Scripture in our memory bank, we have constant access to its strength and power. We have our own little *poustinia* with us wherever we go.

We can meditate on Scripture any moment of the day or night. It's there for solace, for insight, for direction, for guidance. It's there when we go to work and there when we come home. It's there when we vacuum the carpet or mow the lawn. It's there when we rock the baby or ride in the car. It's there when the seas are rough and when they are calm. It's there in the long, dark, wakeful hours of the night and when the sun shines brightly at midday.

The poustinik at some point determined that he would give up any claim he had in this life to wealth, fame, comfort, and family in order to accomplish what he saw as eternal gain. He literally changed the course of his life relinquishing everything he held dear. Even though we may not abandon everything for an austere life as the poustinik, we should still hold the things of this world loosely, yielding them to the Lord in our heart and mind. If we are to change the course of our life, it will be necessary for us to sort out our priorities to make room for our own private, little peaceful *poustinia*. It may be necessary for us to relinquish some things we clutch tightly in order to accommodate new priorities.

Remember Jim Elliott's daring assertion which he backed up with his very life? "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Is there a place for the Gentle Shepherd in this Nuclear Age? Is there room for Him in our whirlwind existence? Only if we can make room for our own private *poustinia* in the midst of this world's bustle. Only if we can balance our database by taking time to feed His Word into the computer of our thinking as we memorize the

Holy Scriptures, meditate on them and make them a vital, valid part of our daily lives.

Note: Because the aspects of time and priorities are major dilemmas for many, these concerns are further addressed in Chapter 6.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, **Poustinia (Madonna House Publications - 1975) pp. 34-35. Used by permission.*