

Preface

It has been my privilege to grow up under the watchful care of Christian parents and godly pastors, elders and teachers. I, in turn, have dedicated my life to full time Christian service. There is nothing I long for more than an unprecedented outpouring of God's Spirit in the earth. But, when I look at the task and then take inventory of my skills and abilities, I feel like the man who proclaimed: "God, the sea is so great and my boat is so small." In my personal quest to help God's kingdom on earth succeed, I have often found myself looking for the golden bullet or the perfect evangelism strategy. I have often puzzled over questions such as:

- How will God bring His people into unity?
- What means will God use to sweep millions into His family?
- How will we get the message out?
- What great things does He expect of me?
- How will I know when to do what?

The answer to all these questions can be neatly answered with one concept—if all God's people will learn to hear His voice and obey His direction, He has already worked out all the details. His Word will be fulfilled. A few years ago, I attended a classical music performance. As I watched the conductor lead scores of talented musicians in a grand performance, God reminded me that all He needs to finish His masterpiece is willing, obedient musicians who will follow His lead. He does not need more programs, better organization, or more excellent presentations as badly as He needs people who will be led by His Spirit.

While pondering this concept, I began to realize how easily I rely on what I am doing rather than on what He is doing. I also found myself becoming frustrated with God when He did not cooperate with my preferred plan of action. The following scripture gave me perspective: "But doom to you who fight your Maker— you're a pot at odds with the potter! Does clay talk back to the potter: 'What are you doing? What clumsy fingers!'" - Isaiah 45:8

The Message God is not clumsy. It's just that His ways are not our ways and we often cannot see the big picture. God is doing something awesome in the earth and our part will only make sense in context of the big picture. God has a master plan and all He needs is a few obedient people to pay close attention to Him and faithfully play their part. My prayer is that this analogy inspires you to play your unique part in the body of Christ.

Act I

The Great Conductor "I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to infuse strength into my limbs and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music." - George Eliot Music has charms to soothe the savage breast to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak. -William Congreve

On Stage A thousand voices are subdued as the house lights fade to nothing but flickering embers floating in the recesses of the cavernous ceiling. Stage lights sparkle and dance upon the semi-circle of gleaming instruments, cradled reverently by a menagerie of immensely talented musicians. Suddenly, a stately figure sporting a long-tailed, black tuxedo confidently emerges from behind the stage curtains. Thunderous applause floods the chamber. The conductor gracefully mounts the central, raised platform and abruptly turns his back to the expectant audience. The world waits. One hundred fifty eyes search the scores that

rest on the music stands in front of them, then dart to their conductor. Utter silence taunts eager ears.

Waiting. Anticipating. Hopeful.

In Action

Suddenly, the conductor's slender, white baton ascends, strikes an apex, then swoops earthward igniting a fire of movement, rhythm and melody. The souls of performers and spectators alike are quickly and effectively swept into an amazing world of passion, victory, power, and joy—a world created by the great composer who now stands before this attentive orchestra, waving his arms purposefully as he superintends the performance of his own masterful work. With pinpoint accuracy, he weaves together an abundant diversity of voices. Upon his command, and as ordained by the score, the spellbound listeners are privileged to savor the sounds of a wide selection of instruments such as the oboe, bassoon, contra bassoon, clarinet, violin, viola, double bass, harp, snare drum, timpani drum, cymbals, celesta, piccolo, French horn and baritone horn. Hearts are arrested, accosted and then soothed as the symphony gains strength and is revealed in all its grandeur.

What a glorious ride is afforded the crowd who is carried along by ever-changing tempos, dynamics, and moods. The conductor calls forth each note at its assigned measure, volume and pitch. Time is suspended as each hearer is treated to musical sensations of swelling, bubbling, leaping, and gurgling. Then, in a moment, with a stroke of the baton, the conductor suddenly transforms the atmosphere by demanding that notes be combined in such a way that one feels this musical creation strutting, flowing, erupting, and even rumbling. Emotions are carried high and low.

One's body tenses and relaxes as the music escalates, pulsates and then subsides.

In Unity

At times the conductor's baton halts in mid-air. Absolutely every participant suspends what he is doing. Resting ... anticipating ... trusting the conductor as he awaits his cue to resume activity. Then, with a wave of his hand, each maestro commences to contribute his very best to the performance. How striking and beautiful this diverse group has become by working together in unity and cooperation under the direction of their conductor. Many individuals who are in attendance have now transcended their sorrow and have begun to soar in their spirits.

So many instruments have joined forces and created such a magnificent effect that improvement is hard to imagine. Yet there is more; as the strings softly serenade, a glance of the conductor's eye cues the pianist who has been patiently awaiting an opportunity to minister. The soloist's hands float atop gleaming ivories, magically filling the entire hall with grace and beauty. No one else is conspicuous during this portion of the symphony.

Instead, everyone thrills to the success of the pianist. Everyone revels in the skill that is blessing the multitudes. In submission to the conductor, the soloist showcases the work of the composer and takes the crowd to new powerful encounters with music. Onlookers are captivated as they stare at the well-trained fingers advancing, convulsing, rippling, tremoring, moaning, swooning, floating, and retreating on the eighty-eight keys which are obediently responding to the touch of a talented artist.

The Finale

But, alas, the soloist too is quieted and the orchestra embarks on one final movement. With skill and finesse the conductor rallies his troops to a grand finale. Each musician faithfully attends to his leader's every beck and call. Such fullness and power reverberates through the auditorium until the time has come and the work is finished. The conductor's baton makes one more dramatic circle in the sky. Each musician ceases his work, and, momentarily, the air is heavy with silence.

It is only then that the effect upon the crowd is evident. Emotionally powered patrons jump to their feet. Hands crash together enthusiastically. The conductor turns to face his audience. There is a surge in the applause as he bows. He then graciously gestures to the soloist, soliciting yet another burst of gratuitous praise. Finally, with a wave of his hand, he acknowledges the musicians. The audience is so moved that even when the conductor has exited the stage they remain standing and clapping until he emerges for another expression of adoration.

Broad smiles. Wet eyes. Exhilaration. Everyone present recognizes that he has heard the work of a master, and that such a work could not be played, and such an orchestra could not be possible if it were not for the leadership of this great conductor. Thus, concludes an exhilaration evening of culture at the grand old symphony hall.

Several hours later as I lay in bed, the power of the master's music lingers. My soul soars. I stare contently into the glorious, starlit heavens. Soon thereafter, whether dreaming or envisioning I do not know, I am suddenly aware of a staggering realization that a much great Composer stands upon an enormous stage, omnisciently conducting the greatest masterpiece of all time – and that I am right smack dab in the middle of it.