

Chapter 24

The Beginning of the Armory

As soon as the wing to our little white church was completed and furnished, we felt we were well accommodated for some time to come and could turn our hands and hearts fully to the spiritual works of God's grace. But almost before the paint had dried on the new wing, it was filled to overflowing with those hungering for the Word. Again we were faced with the problem of building to receive the endless stream of believers. It seemed to us then that our whole ministry was destined to be spent in finding ways to make further room to accommodate God's increase.

God had given us orders to "build an Armory that would seat 3,000 people." He had also given us the plan and pattern of the building in directions so clear and unmistakable, we find it strange to remember that we could have had any doubts or trepidation in following His guidance. It was also evident that at our rate of growth with the constant increase of our numbers, which showed no signs of diminishing, the need for the 3,000 seats which God had demanded we provide would be reached before too long. Yet, when we actually met as a committee to carry out what we felt definitely was the plan of God, because of the fear of so tremendous an undertaking, we found ourselves making plans to allow for our lack of faith in God's magnificent provision.

In the pattern which He had given us for the Armory, there was no representation of a full basement. But when we began to reason among ourselves with earthly logic, it seemed we could not visualize a building without a basement. Therefore, we proceeded to make plans to build a basement church first, promising ourselves that we would fulfill God's greater plan after we had defrayed the cost of the basement structure. (I may say here that God showed His disapproval of our lack of faith and courage by permitting us to sit in this basement for several years.)

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We made arrangements to have the little white church and its recently added wing raised up on rollers and moved a few lots away.

The work of excavation for the basement church began. It was a huge undertaking. As the great steam shovel moved in and began to tear up the earth, the hole in the ground seemed monstrous. The whole undertaking was so beyond us that I was almost ashamed for anyone to know of my connection with it. As the structure began to take shape, it seemed to me one of the largest of its kind I had ever seen. Now I thought in a feeling approaching panic, we shall go from the embarrassment of poverty in accommodations to an embarrassment of riches in unneeded, unused space. I wondered, too, where the money would come from to pay the cost of this huge structure.

But God provided. The day finally came when the basement building was completed. We were ready for the opening and dedication service.¹⁸ On that day before the service, I looked over the auditorium with seats for approximately a thousand persons. I wondered where in the world the people would come from to fill it. However, when service was over every seat had been taken. There were people standing against the walls on three sides as well! It was a great miracle and a great service. God's presence was there to bless. From that day God continued to bless us, until incredibly we would soon find ourselves yet again without room and facilities to accommodate the increase God continued to bring. But more on that that later.

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While we used the new quarters, the Basement Church, for the greater Glory of God and the continuation of His work, we were told time and again by visiting missionaries who had traveled from coast to coast that Bethesda was an oasis in a desert. In truth it surely was. People were saved in every service. People were receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit constantly. Miracles of healing were performed repeatedly, and the good report of God's blessing was spread throughout the land.

Prayer groups met every day and prayed for hours. They prayed for the boys at war¹⁹, for those who were saved during our church meetings - people from all walks of life and every religious belief. Homes were united. Reconciliations were made between husbands and wives,

¹⁸ The Basement Church was completed in 1939 at a cost of \$11,900. The architect was P.J. Funke.

¹⁹ World War II

between parents and children. Alcoholics were delivered. Drug addicts and other victims received complete rescue.

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Note by Patricia Beall Gruits:

At the beginning of World War II, God gave my mother a word: “pray on the radio.” Thinking that these were lyrics, she inquired of family and friends if they knew of any song with this phrase. Soon after, she was contacted by WWJ, a major radio station in Detroit, to pray on the radio at noon for America and our servicemen – just as pastors throughout the Detroit were also being asked to do. A short time later after she had prayed on WWJ, another radio station, WJLB, offered her a 30 minute daily morning program. When this radio time was offered, she knew it was the fulfillment of the word God had given her to “pray on the radio.”

In 1943, she began to broadcast “America To Your Knees” from the platform of the Basement Church. For every broadcast, she sought God for a fresh “word” that would touch the hearts of the people. I supported mother by playing the organ. Following every broadcast, there was a time of prayer. Parents and friends of servicemen flocked to this prayer meeting, weeping before God for the safety of their children and friends – and that God would bless America and restore peace. God was faithful because not one of Bethesda’s servicemen was lost during World War II.

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Following the War, God spoke to us again: “Rise up and begin the work of building the Armory!” This time we believed God. We would build an armory according to God’s plan. With renewed and swelling faith, we believed that every brick, every ounce of concrete, every stick of wood, the hardware, the steel, the labor, and even the seats for it were already prayed in! Though there was nothing in evidence either of money or material to begin the great work, we had every confidence and assurance that as we went along, the mighty *Hand* of God would go along with us.

But that confidence was soon tested. To build, we needed a permit. Since the time we had built the Basement Church, our neighborhood had been rezoned into a strictly residential community. Therefore, it became necessary to petition the Zoning Board for a hearing to secure a permit to build. Many of our neighbors, being of a different faith, were not in sympathy with what we were trying to achieve. On the day

appointed by the Zoning Board for our hearing, these people were notified to be present to state their case in opposition to our request for a permit to build a Temple that would seat 3,000 people. A goodly number were in attendance to protest our petition to be excluded from the provisions of the residential zoning ordinance.

The Chairman of the Board asked these people to state the reasons for their opposition. He questioned each in turn. It became apparent that the whole reason for their not wanting this new church established in their community was that they felt they had stood all they could from us in our present building. Of course, this generalization was not sufficient grounds on which to base a judgment, so the Chairman persisted in his questioning in an effort to ascertain the particulars. Eventually the objections resolved themselves into one principal complaint; it was because of our constant praying. The dissenters informed the Chairman that they heard our people praying as early as 4:30 in the morning when some of them were leaving for work, and we were still praying when they returned from work at night.

This praying, they complained, would then continue throughout the evening. They said they knew people remained in the church and prayed constantly until 1:30 or 2:00 o'clock in the morning, when they finally saw the lights put out in the building. Then, they stated, the whole process would begin all over again at 4:30 that same morning. The Chairman was incredulous. He said to them, "You surely do not expect me to believe that in this day and age, in a city the size of Detroit, there are people praying almost constantly as you say." But each one assured him with vehemence that at all hours of the day and night, whenever they passed our church, they could hear our people praying through the open windows.

The Chairman, finding this hard to believe, questioned them again very searchingly and painstakingly. He was unable to shake their declaration that this was not only true but often even worse than they had said; frequently the praying was actually on a 24-hour basis, entirely around the clock without cessation. Finally convinced, the Chairman thought silently for a time and consulted his colleagues on the Board. Then he declared he certainly would be in favor of granting our petition to build, for he believed that the city of Detroit was in need of a church where the people still prayed in this manner.

And so we were granted our permit, and the great work was ready to proceed. The patience, faithfulness, and unremitting power of the prayer groups surmounted what seemed like an insuperable obstacle.

The irresistible power of prayer was once again demonstrated; the faithfulness of our people justified. Though their prayers which had puzzled and disturbed our neighbors were not directed at the results of this hearing, but rather were concerned with the objectives of healing and rescue, they were, however, an indirect reflection of our faith in erecting the Armory for the glory of God and the ultimate reconciling of all opposition.

Repeatedly during the days of our building of the Temple (the Armory), a monumental task beset with difficulties and trials, regardless of the obstacle that presented itself, we never had any fear that what God had directed us to do would be accomplished. We knew without doubt that God had given the orders to “rise and build.” Therefore it was already as good as done. We thanked God again and again for the blessed assurance that He who had begun the good work was also able to finish it.



Bethesda Missionary Tabernacle,
also called the Basement Church.