

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

**IN CHRIST JESUS.**

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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## LOVE — 2008

It is interesting that the Chinese take a creature as their symbol for their new year, which goes from February to February. For the Chinese, 2007 was the year of the pig, and 2008 will be the year of the rat, both of which are unclean animals and ones forbidden to be eaten under the old covenant. Can you imagine a rat being your symbol for a year? Of course, to some, it is more than a symbol; it is an idol to be worshipped.

Thank God, those who believe in Jesus Christ have been set free from the things of this earth. We don't need symbols. We have Christ. We are commanded to have no other gods before the One true God and not to make for ourselves an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth (Exodus 20.3-4). We are to love God and to keep His commandments. Jesus said: **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment** (Matthew 22.37-38 ASV).

This leads me to what is on my heart for this year as a word from the Lord. Every year I ask the Lord to give me a word for the year; a word that will sum up the year that lies ahead; a word that will be woven into the fiber of the hours, the days, and the months to come. The word that was given to me for 2007 was **victory**. I took this to be a personal word for my wife and me since the previous seven years had been ones of severing and trial in many aspects of our lives. We thank God for all that we experienced during these years, for in them, we experienced more of the life of Christ formed in us through His love and grace. To be sure, there is more work to be done in conforming us to His image, but we must pause and give Him all the praise, honor, and glory for what He has done. The song that seemed to resonate in my heart as the year ended was written by Twila Paris titled "You Have Been Good." It is a simple tune but it captures the heart of the steadfast love of Almighty God. "Oh Lord, You have been good. You have been faithful to all generations. Oh Lord, Your steadfast love and tender mercy have been our salvation. For by Your hand we have been fed and by Your spirit we have been led. Oh Lord, Almighty God, Father Unchanging, Upright and Holy."

As I reflect on the word *victory*, I have two thoughts. The first is that for us personally, the victory has only begun. 2007 was merely the year of preparation for the victory to come, which is in the One who loves us. We overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loves us. The second thought is that in some way that I cannot fully explain, I sense that this word *victory* is for more than us; it is for the Lord's people. I sense that there is some spiritual transaction going on before the throne of God and among the celestials where Christ is seated at the right hand of His Father that will lead a company of His people, the conquerors or, as some would say, the overcomers in Christ, into spiritual victory. They will be the firstfruits of His coming kingdom on earth. The Lord Jesus is preparing His complement, His likeness, through whom He will head up all in the heavens and on the earth to bring about the purpose of the eons, all to the glory of God the Father so that He may be All in all.

Now, this leads to the word that the Lord spoke to my heart for 2008. It is a word that goes hand-in-hand with the word *victory*. It is the word *love*. We could say that victory always leads to love, and love always leads to victory. They are like two cords woven together. After all, what was the victory of the cross of Calvary? Was it not the triumph of love? At the cross and later from the tomb, sin and death were conquered for all mankind, without exception. But what is the revelation of the death of the Son of God on the cross? **We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us** (1 John 3.16). The

cross revealed the love of God. John declared: **God is love** (1 John 4.8, 16). The declaration to the world for all of us who believe in Jesus is *God is love*. But the cross was not the end of the story, for the tomb had to be emptied for there to be a true victory. Jesus was crucified in weakness. He had no power of His own to come down from the cross. He committed His life into the hands of His heavenly Father. The Father could not leave the Son of His love in the grave. Jesus was resurrected from among the dead according to the Spirit of holiness (Romans 1.4). Life is in the Son, and he who has the Son has the life (1 John 5.11-12). Love leads to resurrection life! Is this not conquering life? Is this not the victorious life? Most assuredly, it is.

However, the word *love* was not the only word given to me in regard to 2008. During August, 2007, I was in prayer, and the words that came to my heart were: "Do you know how much I love you? There is something much deeper than the cross." I was very puzzled by this word and have prayed over it many times to know the answer. I knew it had to do with love, but in what way? After all, how can anything be deeper than the love revealed through the cross? Was this question leading me to something unbiblical or extra-scriptural? Intellectually, I reasoned that the answer must be related to resurrection life. But frankly, in the months that followed, I received no satisfactory answer, so I laid the whole matter aside. Unexpectedly, the answer came on December 30, 2007 as I began to inquire of the Lord for a word for 2008. Perhaps what I have to share next is too personal, but as I have meditated on it, it seems that it is a word for others as well. If this is of the Lord, it will bear fruit. If it is not, well, forgive me and pray for me.

On the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> I was in prayer, and the Lord began to speak to my heart: "The deeper love is My love ministering in your heart. It is when I minister to you in love that there is true worship." Worship filled my heart at that moment and I could not contain my emotions. I was flooded with His love and began weeping, and later when I tried to explain it to my lovely wife, all I could do was weep. I still weep when I consider that moment with the Lord. It was like an oasis in a dry desert. It was like a pause in time when nothing else mattered. But could these words be true?

As I have considered them, a few thoughts have come to mind. First, Jesus often left His disciples to be alone with His Father. Jesus only did what His Father told Him to do; He only spoke what His Father spoke. What did He do when He was on the mountain all alone with His Father? Surely, when He was with His Father, the Father ministered to His heart. It was a heart-to-heart communion. Is it not reasonable to assume that the Father strengthened and encouraged His Son during these times? Second, when we first believe in Jesus, we are born from above as we receive the spirit of God. Paul wrote: **Because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us** (Romans 5.5 ASV). With the spirit of God, we were given the very love of God to reside within us. It is not our love; it is God's love. Under the new covenant, the Lord promises: **I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts** (Hebrews 8.10 NASB). The great and first commandment is to love. Consequently, the law of love is the first law to be written on our hearts as the spirit of God takes up residence within us and we receive the love of God.

The final thought has to do with worship itself. Organized churches place a great deal of emphasis on Sunday worship as they gather together to do certain things that they feel are necessary to worship God, to please Him. Unfortunately, so much of what is done is merely man's effort to try to reach God, which is religious tradition, or it is trying to come into some heightened state of emotion, which often is soul-worship. Jesus said to the woman at the well: **But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers** (John 4.23 ASV). Perhaps true worship in spirit and truth is worship that begins with God Himself as He ministers His love in our hearts. After all, God is the Giver and the Initiator.

**But God!** Our God and Father desires to minister His love in our hearts. It is the same love that triumphed on the cross, not the love displayed in death but the incorruptible love of God displayed in resurrection life. May He minister His love in your heart!