

**A Spiritual Experience of
the Saints at Creston, Iowa**

*An Interview with High Priest Paul Winans
by Seventy Delbert Smith*

(The following, a transcript from a tape recording, has been edited to correct some grammatical errors and for ease of reading.)

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I am Delbert Smith, and on this tape I am interviewing Paul Winans of Creston, Iowa, who holds the office of high priest in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

D: First of all, Paul, I wondered if you would have anything to share with us before we get into the body of the interview.

P: Yes. We lived in Boone, Iowa up to 1955. I was pastor there, an elder in the congregation there for nine years; and then we had the opportunity to move to Creston. We were very happy about this, because we felt we were moving into a place that had a new church, a fine group of people, and some friends that we had known for years. We made the move, and the congregation there seemed to be what we expected it to be when we got there.

Over the years from 1955-60, I could see a growth in the congregation toward the spiritual things that needed to be in the lives of our people. There were a few prophecies brought about the congregation that come to my mind right now. One of them I can remember very definitely. They were told, in 1955, in December, that: the Lord had a special work for this people to do; that there were some there that were opposing this work that was to come amongst this people; and that if they would not change their ways, He would remove them from that place so His work could be brought about.

Then in 1960, in the fall, I was asked to be pastor of the congregation by Bro. Harry Simons. In 1962 I was ordained a high priest under the hands of Bro. Simons and placed on the Stake High Council, and I won't forget very easily the experience I had in this ordination.

D: Well, would you tell us a little bit about it, Paul?

P: It was at a stake conference. As I was ordained by Bro. Simons, Bro. Wilbur Chandler, and Bro. Wilbur Prall, it seemed that the Spirit was there in such great power that I was raised up off the stool I was seated on. Some of the promises that were made to me, if I would be faithful, were just almost unbelievable, as far as I was concerned. I felt a Spirit there that I had never felt before, and a great power and authority come to me, that I had not felt before. I knew that if I could keep myself in tune with God as the words told me to, we were going to have some outstanding experiences in the congregation at Creston, Iowa.

D: Well, Paul, you'll be talking here [through this tape recording] with some pastors. Were there any problems, or was this really a model branch you felt like you'd moved into?

P: Well, I thought it was about average. They weren't having prayer service at all, because they couldn't get people out to prayer service. Once in a great while they would have a prayer service in a home, with an average attendance of ten to twelve. In the years past, however, previous to this, it had been a congregation that had had a lot of trouble. It had even been said by some of the Church officials that Christ, Himself, could not straighten out the problems at Creston. It was known all over the Church as a "problem congregation."

D: That would indicate, then, that it might not be too different from some of the others that our pastors have.

P: That's right. All pastors have those problems.

D: Well listen, Paul. Did you have any misgivings or anything about becoming pastor of the congregation when you were asked to accept that responsibility?

P: I did, for one reason. We seemed to have in that congregation a group of people—some of them relatives—that were cliquish. I knew that I was going to have to, in some way, minister to these people if we were going to bring them about to the place where they could offer ministry. This was one of the problems I knew I was going to have. But I knew I had good backing in Bro. Simons, and that with the help of Delbert Smith, we were going to be able to accomplish these things that the Lord would require of me as a pastor.

D: Did you have any experiences that helped you to accept that responsibility?

P: Yes, I did. Several of them. One of them especially I want to tell you about.

Bro. Delbert came into our congregation in 1960. He came to us with a large rack of visual slides, or whatever you might call them—a kind of a big booklet of things that he turned over and talked about. One of these sheets said something about the fact that we needed to pray for people more than we had been doing. If I remember the wording correctly, Bro. Delbert told us that if we really were concerned about the lives of people, if we would put them on our heart and pray about them enough, that the Lord would move in their life. This really turned me on and helped me to realize that this was something we needed to be doing in our congregation—prayer and fasting.

We started here, in trying to get ourselves in the mood of prayer and in fasting like the Lord wanted us to do. I talked to the people all the time—every opportunity we had as a pastor there, to preach or to teach or at prayer services—we talked this business of praying and fasting about people. We set a [definite?] pattern of “ten and one” to pray for. I had had it given to me through the Spirit, it seemed to me, that there were ten—five female and five male people of our congregation—that needed our prayers very much, and that if we prayed for them and fasted for them long enough, the Lord would rule in their lives. Especially one man that I was concerned about, who the Lord seemed to tell me was a very important man. This was where the “ten and one” came in. Gradually, as we did this, I could see more people taking part in this.

Then we started pointing out the need to be obedient to the financial law and the Word of Wisdom. We went right down the line on the Word of Wisdom. We weren't a bit backward in declaring against coffee, tea, hot chocolate and the cola drinks, in explaining to them that this was the will of the Lord, and in talking about the filing of their inventory and paying of their tithing. Gradually, over a period of about a year and a half to two years, we could see our people joining in and being obedient to these things. I would say at least seventy-five percent of our congregation by early fall of 1962 were very much in tune with these things.

D: Well, that's a pretty good percentage. Now, were all your priesthood filing tithing statements when you began this project?

P: No! In fact, we had very poor record—about ten percent of our congregation. If we'd have had our priesthood alone, we'd have had about twenty percent of our congregation. So you can see there were about half of them in tune with this.

D: Where did you begin to teach this? Did you just start preaching in sermons? How did you go about getting this going?

P: Well, first of all, we had a lot of priesthood meetings. I had a couple of wonderful fellows to help me as my counselors. I had an assistant pastor that was very much in tune with what I was trying to do, and we talked about this in a lot of priesthood meetings. We had many prayer services for the priesthood with this in mind, and many classes. We were always teaching a class on the law of tithing,

or the sacrament, the ordinances, and so forth, so they would become acquainted with their priesthood office.

One thing I always tried to do in my work with them as pastor was to see that they worked in their office, in their calling: the priests were out in the homes visiting, the deacons were out in the homes visiting, coming back and reporting to the pastor what was needed in the homes so he could send one of the other priesthood members out. The teachers were visiting in the homes and doing their job. Overall, the priesthood had, during this time, quite an educational program going.

I appointed one of the elders of the congregation to supervise the work of the Aaronic priesthood. He was able to organize them. He would bring them to the church when they went on their visiting, and he would talk with them individually about what he expected them to do. He would read to them out of the scriptures, and he would pray with them. Then they would go from the church into the homes really prepared to minister as they should.

D: Now, I wanted to mention a specific instance here that kind of meant something to me. Sometimes little things make a big difference. Do you remember that one time in your home we were visiting with Bro. Shakespeare?

P: Yes.

D: I had seen quite a change in him since he had come to the Creston congregation from another congregation. When he came there, he wasn't too active as a priest, was he?

P: No, he wasn't.

D: He had become very active and, I felt, instituted one of the finest home ministry programs that I've seen in the Church.

Do you remember his testimony that night? When I asked him, I said, "Alma, how do you account for the change that's come in you?" He said, "Well, Brother Delbert, I can mark the day of my spiritual growth from the day I became willing to give up my coffee."

P: Yes, I'll tell you about that experience. Alma and his wife wouldn't come to church. I was rather surprised when I found out he wasn't an elder, because I had in my mind that he was. He was a priest. Every time I would see him anywhere, I would ask him to come to church. One Wednesday night he decided he would come, and he brought his wife with him. As he sat there in the congregation, it came to me through the Spirit by discernment that I could read what that man needed in his life—what he was doing that was displeasing to the Lord, the reason he was disinterested, the reason the Lord would not bless him in the way that He could.

So I went to his home immediately, and I told we wanted him to continue to come to church. I also said to him, "Alma, I know what is lacking in your life that is causing you not to be interested in the Church as much as you should as a priesthood member. Alma, the Lord has revealed to me that you and your wife are imbibing in coffee and Coca Cola and things that we've been talking about in the congregation that are injurious to your body and your mind. The Lord just cannot bless us unless we are a clean vessel."

I could see right away that I had hit on a touchy point, because his wife showed her rebellion immediately. She did go, though, and get the Doctrine and Covenants out, and we read what it said about the Word of Wisdom. She also admitted that she'd been playing cards, which she knew was not the right thing for them to do. She said, "I just knew you were coming down to see us. Alma and I both said when we got home, 'We just don't want him to come and see us.'" They were rebelling about this.

But in our talk that evening, through some understanding and through reading his patriarchal blessing, where he was made some wonderful promises—promises he could not have fulfilled unless he was in the office of elder—they came to an understanding that they should try this. After we left, they said, "Well, what harm can come in trying this at least?" So right that night they made their pledge with God that they would try this thing, and they have kept it up to this day, as far as I know.

Marge said she got over her headaches and over her nervousness. She became practically a well woman again.

D: I was certainly thrilled to see what had happened in their lives.

P: Yes. Alma started coming to church with renewed desire to serve, and it wasn't long until he was called to the office of elder. In his calling, he was told that he would especially be gifted with many gifts he could use for the good of people in the Church. And this is the way it has turned out with Alma. He has had a wonderful gift of healing and of prayer, and he has had a gift of prophecy.

I want you pastors and priesthood members who are listening to this to know that it isn't easy for a pastor to go to a man like this and tell him the truth about himself. But if we really love the men who are under our care, and our members, when we see them doing things that are displeasing to the Lord—realizing their possibilities and the talents and the gifts they have to offer the Church—the way we can show we really love them is to go to them and inform them of what the Lord has revealed to us. You'll find that ninety percent of them will receive this with open arms and really believe it. Make sure that you're right, however, that this is what the Lord wills for them. Then, when you go to them with this kind of love and this kind of ministry, great blessing will come to the people.

D: What you're saying here, Paul, is that this kind of admonition should be given under the Spirit of God.

P: Oh, yes. Every time. Not just because you feel like this is your own wisdom. But pray about it and fast about it, and the Lord will reveal to you what you need to do for the life of this individual.

D: Paul, share with me just some of the highlights of the spiritual experiences you had during this period, maybe something of how they began, and so forth.

P: All right. I stated that we had worked on this problem in our congregation from 1960 to early in the fall of 1962. We know now, from something the Lord brought to us, that on June the 20th the Lord said to John the Beloved, "Go to Creston and minister to my Saints there." I'll tell you more about that later, but you can see why this started. This is June the 20th of 1962. You can see why we started to have an outpouring of the Spirit. It seemed that prior to July the 4th we were having quite a few people so much involved in this that they could hardly wait to get to the church. They had a testimony they had never had before in their lives, especially my assistant pastor. He was a man who had come into the priesthood not too long before this and who was doing a wonderful work amongst the people there, showing his love to so many.

On July the 4th in our town we have an area-wide celebration. Sometimes there have been as many as 50,000 people come into our town a day before the Fourth and on the Fourth. All of the young people seem to congregate there, and everybody has a good time. We have ballgames, horseshoe games, tennis games, boat races, band concerts, and talent concerts—just about everything you can imagine. Fireworks. This was a big day.

But this time, the Fourth of July happened to light on Wednesday, when we were supposed to have a prayer service. I felt led through the Spirit, for three weeks previous to this, that we should have our prayer service, regardless of this great celebration. I talked with my companion and my other friend—who was the oldest elder in our congregation, a father to the congregation. They both discouraged me from having this prayer service. They felt that maybe, just this one time, we should let the bars down and let our young people go out and have a good time. But the Lord seemed to say to me, "Have the prayer service, and let those come that will." I decided to do it that way, and we had our prayer service.

Much to our surprise, all of the young people in our congregation came to the meeting that night and brought some others, including these five girls that we'd been concerned about and praying about all this time. We had a wonderful outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord during that time. As I got up to close the prayer service that night, the Spirit came over me very strongly to speak to the people about some things the Lord wanted them to know. The message came to me to counsel the two young girls

who were known then as the Long twins, about some things that would come into their lives if they were faithful. There was other information brought to us through the Spirit.

As I spoke that night, the swinging doors at the back of our church opened, and coming in through the two doors were two beings I knew to be angels. It rather astonished me, because these two were as identical as anything I had ever seen in my life; they looked exactly alike. They had white robes on, and they seemed to float more than they did walk, around behind the pews. They both had really black, straight hair. It is just impossible to describe what they looked like, because I knew them to be heavenly beings. One of them came up the aisle and put his hand on the shoulder of a man I had been praying about. This was my answer, because he [the angel] designated to me that this was the man I must use in a certain way.

The other one went around behind the other side of the aisle. He came up and put his hand on the head of a young boy a mother was holding, helping me to know that something special was in this young boy's life. He had come into this home as an adopted child. At the close of this experience, after the angels had left, the Lord said to the people that, "If you are faithful as you have been in the past," He would pour out spiritual blessings upon our congregation we could hardly realize were possible. Not only would the Melchisedec priesthood be bringing to us gifts that we needed, but they would even be exercised by the Aaronic priesthood.

The only thing the Lord asked of us was to do four things. Three definite things He said were: "You must be obedient to prayer and fasting; you must continue to be obedient to the financial law; and you must continue to be obedient to the Word of Wisdom and to the commandments found in My scriptures. If you do these things, I promise you these blessings."

This was on July the 4th. This seemed to really thrill them. They seemed to really thrill our people, and they didn't want to leave the church that night. Our young people, instead of going out to the late carnival and the late fireworks that were going to take place, went over to another home and had a Zion's League meeting, and didn't even go out to the place where there were so many worldly things going on.

It was just a short while after this that the first one of these five men we had been praying about came forth and was baptized into the Church. Now he stands as one of our very fine deacons living in Independence. A short time later, one other joined the Church. At the time of his baptism I can remember very definitely that the evidence was given to me that he would hold priesthood. He was ordained a little later on in the priesthood of the Church. Another young man was baptized out of these five.

Shortly after that, the fourth one came forth to be baptized. I want to tell you a little bit about the experience with him, because it was such an outstanding experience.

D: Is this the one that was the high school principal here that you're talking about now?

P: Yes. I had an experience with a man by the name of Don Davis, who was the principal of the Bridgewater-Fontanelle school system. This man was a very intelligent man. For many years, his wife had been a faithful church member and had tried to get him to know that the Book of Mormon was true. But for some reason or other, he could never believe in this book. One night he came to our prayer service. He was spoken to through the Spirit and told that if he really wanted to find out about the truthfulness of this book, if he would put the book under his arm and go off by himself in a secluded place—seven different days in seven different weeks—and pray to God, that He would reveal to him the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Unknown to his wife or to any of us, this man carried this out to the letter. However, when the seventh day was through in the seventh week, he came to his wife and said that now he had kept his bargain with the Lord, and the Lord had revealed nothing to him at all. She was very upset about this. She came to me and cried about it and said, "Now what do we do?" I told Sister Davis she should not be concerned. The Lord had not promised He would reveal anything to Don immediately, and he should continue to pray. I knew the Lord would reveal this to him.

About three weeks after this, he came to prayer service again. This night he was spoken to through the Spirit. He was told in this message that as he was making one of his tours in Mexico, looking over the ruins and investigating the record of the Book of Mormon, that he was in a museum and was looking at a tablet of stone. As he noticed this tablet of stone, his soul thrilled at the *[message(?)]* behind it. The message went on to say: “I, the Lord, am going to tell you about this tablet of stone.”

This was the message that came to him: As Ammoron, who was the son of Amos, was fleeing before the enemy, he was afraid he would be destroyed—and the records that were in his possession. So he secluded himself in a cave for a period of two years and put some of the records on these tablets of stone so they could not be destroyed. The Lord said, “I am revealing this to you, and this is something I have not revealed to anyone on the face of the earth since the restoration of my Church.” This was the testimony this man had been praying for—that the Lord would reveal to him something that had not been revealed to anyone else.

After that prayer meeting, he came by me in the receiving line and said, “I think it’s time I joined the Church.” The next Sunday he joined the Church and is now one of our elders. He is doing a good work in the Church and has a marvelous testimony to bring to people about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

D: This is one of the interesting things to me. It isn’t just a matter of their having spiritual experiences, but it’s the changes in the lives of individual people like this that really thrill me.

P: That’s right. You know, I think, Delbert, one of the greatest blessings I could see coming among our people were the testimonies they received. The young children—four years old, five years old—were bearing testimonies and praying like you never heard before from children. Our prayer services were so filled with the Spirit that many times they were two hours long, and sometimes even three hours long. There was no way of shutting them off. We didn’t have a lot of songs: we had an opening song, we had a closing song. The rest of the time was given to prayers and testimony.

The young people were so involved in this that they came with great expectation to every service we had. They came questioning the Lord about certain things they wanted to know. Hardly ever did the Lord not bless us in some way during this service—through the gift of song or gift of prayer, the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues. Most of all, the gift of testimony and prayer. This was a great testimony to me of the truthfulness of what was happening.

D: You mentioned the Long twins. I would like to get on here a little preface of my experience with them and then let you carry it on from there, if you would.

[Gap in the tape] ...Guthrie Grove. Sharon Long was there in the companionship of one of our young Church member boys. As I sat in the service there, I saw Sharon. I didn’t know who she was, but the Lord made known to me that this young lady wanted to be baptized. So I went to her when I found the couple together away from others, and I told her I had had this experience. I said, “The Lord made it known to me that you wanted to be baptized. Isn’t that right?” She said it was. She was a little surprised that I knew it, though. She said she hadn’t told anyone but would need to get her parents’ consent before she was baptized. I urged her to do this. She went back to get her parents’ consent, and from my understanding of it, they really had quite a fuss over this. Her twin sister almost rejected her. Maybe you can tell a little bit about this.

P: Yes. This is what happened to Sharon. She worked for me in my office as my office girl, and we talked about a lot of these things. Her sister, at first, did make all kinds of fun of her because she believed in this Book of Mormon. I think the turning point in the sister came when she started coming to church with her twin.

One night, through the Spirit of the Lord, I was allowed to speak to these young ladies in the gift of an unknown tongue. It just absolutely thrilled these two girls. As I looked down at them, in remembering this experience, I can remember how much they looked like two Indian maidens sitting there. The Lord counseled them about His love for them, how they should be obedient to their parents,

and actually gave them direction what they should do with their lives. Through this, this girl became, perhaps, the stronger of the two.

D: Sheryl?

P: Yes.

P: Finally, they made the decision that they wanted to join. But they had to wait until they got to be the age of eighteen, which was shortly before Easter.

D: Why did they have to wait for that?

P: So they wouldn't have to have the permission of their parents.

D: Why? Were their parents opposed to this?

P: Oh, their parents were opposed to it right up to the last Saturday night before the baptism! I remember very plainly the two young girls coming to me on Friday night before this baptism and crying about how their mother had carried on. She had threatened that they were going to put them out of the home and everything else if they joined "that old Latter Day Saint Church." I was up in my pastor's study with them and Brother Cecil, who was my assistant. I prayed for them, and we joined hands and had prayer. I told them then to have no fear because the Lord was going to work in their father's life.

One of these girls, at about this same time, was going with one of the young men in our congregation. They were engaged and going to be married in June; so this was along in March. They were afraid to go home and tell the parents about this engagement. Bro. Cecil and I talked with them. I told Sheryl to go to the home, take Sherman with her, and announce the fact that they were engaged to be married in June. (Of course, being eighteen, she would be able to do this, after April.) I told her—I thought very much under the influence of the Good Spirit—that the Lord would come and soften the heart of her father. This would bring about their approval for the engagement.

They went to the home, and Sheryl said when they announced it, her mother flew mad and reared out of the door as hard as she could go. She went to the car, her father right after her. They drove around until past midnight, but when they came back, Sheryl could see that a change had come over her father. He had talked to her mother, and they came back and gave permission for the engagement.

D: Well.

P: You remember we said that there were five women and five men...

D: Yes.

P: ...the "ten and one" we were talking about. The "one" we were praying for, by the way, was this man who was the educated man, and the prize catch—if you want to put it in a crude way—of the group. We still had one to go. But these girls all had, at this time, been baptized in the Church. A very unusual thing about these five young women is that they are not only members of the Church, but they are all married to priesthood members in the Church.

D: That is interesting, very interesting.

P: During this time none of the congregation knew who they were praying for, Delbert. They knew they were praying for "ten and one". Later on, it was made known to me that we should pray for forty and four hundred. The reason for this was that the Lord said if we were faithful to do what we should, the day would come when we would have four hundred members in the congregation and forty priesthood members. We haven't been able to live up to that, because we haven't reached that yet. But we did accomplish the other.

The number eleven man, or the ten and then the one man, was baptized in the spring of 1964. So we lived to see the day when all these “ten and one” we had been praying for so long—the men all from divided homes—came into the Church.

D: You felt maybe the prayers were worthwhile, then?

P: The prayers were worthwhile. They certainly were. I know that if a congregation anywhere will take on a project like this, and really pray and fast and be obedient to the things we were asked to be obedient to, these great experiences will come into their lives.

Now, you know, Delbert, we knew that something very unusual was happening in this congregation.

D: Yes.

P: We knew something had to be going on. We just couldn't realize—some of us—how a people could be so lifted up and so much in tune with everything about the gospel as these people were. Now, we wouldn't want anybody to believe that we had a hundred percent cooperation from all of our members, because there were some that were not behind this at all. But about seventy-five percent of our congregation was.

One day I had made known to me why we had such wonderful help in the congregation during this period of time. I told you about the Lord saying to John the Beloved, on June the 20th, to go minister to the Saints in Creston. During about six months, when all this was taking place, we had forty-four gifts of the gospel exercised in our congregation. They included the gift of healing and the gift of preaching by all of our men—including our brother, Delbert, here, who spoke to us many times under the influence of the Spirit, the Good Spirit. Our men who really weren't gifted in preaching were preaching with a knowledge they had not had previous to this time.

D: And with power.

P: And with power, great power. We knew that something very unusual was taking place.

One evening I was over at the church, about 4:30, praying to the Lord. It was my custom to go to the church quite often and pray to God about the congregation. (These prayers were always offered behind the pulpit. I guess I had a rather funny idea about this, but I felt that there was where the exercising of the Spirit was more than anywhere else in that building, because we had had so many of our men who had spoken to us through the Spirit—those that were there and those that came into our congregation. There was where the Spirit of God was the strongest, I felt, so there is where we did our praying.)

I prayed. Then I went and sat down on the end of a pew. I was just meditating about some of the things that had happened and some of the things I still needed to do, when the swinging doors of the church opened. In came an individual, the likeness of which I just cannot describe. The minute he came through the door, I knew who he was, and I was very amazed to see him there. As I was about to say something, he spoke and said, “Don't touch me. I am John the Beloved.” I knew that was who he was; I knew this was John the Beloved. He came up and sat down on the other end of the pew, and we sat there for a half hour and conversed. It was wonderful to be there in the presence of this being, this spiritual being.

I could not begin to describe to you what he was like. There is no way of describing what the flesh of a man looks like who is perfect... or his hair, or his clothing, or his shoes... or anything. I can only say that they were not of this world. It was something that... The cloth in his suit, even, was not ever seen by me anywhere. His hair was bushy and white. He was well-groomed in every way.

We sat there and talked for this half hour. Then he got up and said, “I have to go. Do not follow me.” I didn't, and he went out through the swinging doors. I could hear the doors close, and he was gone.

D: As you gave this description, I was reminded of a statement by Apostle Oakman. He said that some things like this are difficult to describe, because we don't yet have a celestial language to express celestial things.

P: That's right. That's right. I was told by him [John the Beloved] that these things we had talked about I would not be able to tell anyone except as the Lord saw fit from time to time. As I was prepared—and as the people were prepared—he would bring back to my mind some of the things we had talked about. Only once has this ever happened.

D: May I make a comment here? One of the things I enjoyed, Paul, was particularly in the young people. I remember that many times on a Wednesday evening, they would gather there at the church early and have a prayer. Then you would find them sitting on the front rows for prayer service. At first it was a little bit of a surprise to me, but then it began to be something I almost expected—whether I was preaching, or prayer service... You could see they were spiritually prepared to receive of the Lord.

P: Yes. During the time we were having all these experiences, too, our young people were going from the high school, Delbert, across the street to the home of one of our young elders.

D: Oh yes.

P: They were having prayer service there at noon. Instead of eating their noon meal, they were fasting and having prayer services. Quite a few of the nonmember kids were going over there with them. Every Wednesday, especially, they would meet together and have prayer and prepare for the service of the night. They would eat no dinner and no supper. They would fast and, as you say, come early and be on the front seats. Many times, if you remember, they would be singing songs.

D: Right.

P: Beautiful songs. Unaccompanied. But they would be singing.

One thing we always did. My companion, who was the organist, always went to the church early. She would be sitting at the organ playing music very quietly on the organ, beautiful music. We would not turn the lights on in the church. The only light we had on was the light up in the front in the middle of our church, just enough light for people to see to come in and be seated. Our people would come in and, under that kind of an influence, be seated quietly; no talking, no noise. When the service was ready to start, everybody was in the mood to worship. Before we opened our service, the organ would quiet down really low.

I always used an elder in charge. All the time I've been pastor, I have never had anybody take charge of a prayer service except he was at least an elder, because they are the spiritual fathers of the congregation.

Almost all the time the men who were on the rostrum were of the Melchisedec priesthood. Once in a great while I felt especially led to invite one of the Aaronic men for a special duty. But there is where our elders should be bringing their greatest ministry: at the worship series—prayer services, especially—amongst the saints. Then one of our men, just before we opened our service, would read a scripture and offer a prayer. We would turn the lights on, and we would go into our prayer service. Of course then, the organ would cease playing. Our people were really prepared, then, to worship as they should.

Another thing we did, Delbert, in way of preparation for prayer service I thought was of great value to us. The men always knew long ahead of time who was going to be on the rostrum that night. We would go to the church at 5:00—the ones who were going to be up front. We would meet together, have a round of prayers, read some scriptures, and make our plans for the service. We were blessed so many times with the Spirit of God and the preparation we made in this way that I know it paid us to do this. I would recommend this to every pastor. Take your men and go to the church, pray and worship

with them ahead of time, and get them in the frame of mind they need to be in to really bring ministry to the people.

I wrote some of this down and had an item in the *Herald* about entitled “It Happened in Creston.” I meant to write a sequel to that and title it “It Can Happen Anywhere,” but I never did get around to that. I know it can happen anywhere. All the Lord requires is for a group of people—a majority of a congregation—to be spiritually conditioned so they can receive His ministry. It is written in Section 7 about John the Beloved and what his desire is: to minister to the heirs of salvation. This is one of the works that he is to do.

I know that any pastor, if he can lift his congregation up... And it has to start with the pastor. It’s got to start there. The people can’t do it without him. If he can work with his congregation—his priesthood first, and then the membership—enough of them to show the Lord that they really mean business... I’ve often said you have to woo the presence of God. You have to do that. He wants to know if you really mean business. If you can get this done, He will come to you and minister to you in a way that you just can’t believe.

I want to tell you something about the final service we had while John the Beloved was still with us. There were a lot of people there that night. It was the night after New Year’s [of 1963], and our children—a lot of them—were still at home, because it was a special night. It happened to hit on a Wednesday night. New Year’s Day was on Tuesday, and they had a few days yet before they had to return to their college responsibilities, and so forth.

There were over a hundred people there. Our service had lasted three hours. As I got up to close the service—which had been a wonderful service—it seemed as if something took hold of me and pulled the spirit out of my body. I could feel myself leaving my body and standing over to one side. As I looked back toward where I was standing, it wasn’t me; it was John the Beloved. I recognized him immediately, because I had seen him before. He started speaking. The congregation did not see him as John the Beloved, but they heard his voice and were very much moved by this experience.

We have a record of most of the things he said to us that night. We didn’t have it recorded, because this was kind of a surprise to us. But there were several of the women in the congregation who took notes, including my own companion. She has taken down what we could remember, and I would like to have her read some of this.

D: Well I think that would be fine, especially some of the parts that would be generally applicable...

P: Yes

D: and of help...

P: What this great man said to us.

D: Right.

Sr. W: “I am John the Beloved, the same who walked and talked with Christ in His ministry here on earth. On June 20th, the Father said, ‘John, go minister to my Saints at Creston.’ Six months have passed, and I must bid you farewell. But before I go, I want to talk with you about some of the things which I have noticed as I visited in your homes, your places of business, and in your church services.

“I was in your services seven times on Wednesday evening and one Sacrament service. I was here on July the 4th, and I brought the angels Lehi and Nephi, sons of Helaman, with me and allowed them to minister to you. I have been here also with Peter and James two different times, and this was made known to some of the priesthood of your congregation.

“I have heard your prayers and your testimonies as they have ascended to your Heavenly Father and want you to know that they were pleasing to Him. I have spoken to you twice before—once through the gift of wisdom, once through the gift of discernment.

And even though I stand before you tonight in the person of my brother and you cannot see me, yet you can feel my presence and know that I am here.

“I am your brother. You are my sisters and brothers, and I have been called to minister to those who are righteous and follow the commandments of God in these, the last days. Many of you have not followed the commandments as the Father would have you do, but because of fasting and prayer and obedience to the financial law and the Word of Wisdom on the part of many of you present here tonight, the Heavenly Father has granted me permission to speak to you before I take leave.

“One day I talked with Jesus, my Brother, while in the flesh, and asked permission to remain on earth and minister to the people, especially in the last days, and this was granted unto me by Jesus, the Christ. I am not a physical body, neither am I a spiritual body, but am in a special spiritual condition which is not known to man, known only to God. Therefore, you cannot see me, but I can see you, and I have been in your homes—many of your homes. I have seen you in your homes as you have gathered your children around. This is the plan that the Father has.

“I have been in your places of business and in your classrooms at school. I have been in your kitchens and have whispered in your ears, as you have been washing dishes...” [*Gap in the tape.*]

Sr. W: ...These scriptures were to help the people—the women especially—as they told the gospel story and tried to convert other people. We didn’t get all of those words down. We didn’t put them down, because we couldn’t remember exactly what was said. But this was the sense.

D: This was the overall picture. That’s the important thing.

Sr. W: Yes.

“I was with my Brother Larry, as he went to Lucas on a preaching mission, and I stood by his side and whispered in his ear every word as he spoke to the people there. The ministry for this congregation has been under my supervision for this period of time. The last two Sunday evenings, I stood beside my brother and your servant, Delbert Smith, and whispered in his ear those things which he needed to bring to you for your spiritual growth.

“I have been in the home of the Long twins several times. I have seen the desires of your hearts and the wholesomeness of your lives, and I have seen the tears you have shed over your parents.”

Sr. W: This was to the girls.

“I met with Sheryl and her young man at the church and was with them as they waited for her father to come, and I softened his heart.

“I was with the elders many times, during their administration to the sick.”

Sr. W: There was more given there. We didn’t get down the exact words, so we didn’t fill that in.

“During my visits in your homes, I observed many things that were displeasing. Many of my brothers and sisters were wasting time in front of their television sets—many of my ministry, who needed so badly to study the scriptures because of their lack of understanding. I sorrowed when I saw how some of them disobeyed the Word of Wisdom. I tried to enter some of the homes, and they closed the door and I could not enter.

“I have heard many of your discussions and was disturbed because many of you could not forgive with your hearts your brothers and sisters.

“I have walked with you in the grocery stores and whispered in your ears as you were about to purchase something that was not necessary for you to sustain life. Many listened,

but many turned a deaf ear and listened to the whisperings of the evil one and purchased those things which were not a just want.

“I have been in your places of business and have seen you about to do those things which were not right in the sight of God and whispered in your ear. Some of you listened, and some did not.

This congregation of Creston has been blessed above that of any other congregation in the world. Now, I must leave you. But if you will continue in fasting and prayer, continue in obedience to the financial law and the Word of Wisdom, the Father will send you another Comforter, for He desires to continue to bless you.

[Unclear] “...I have been sent by commandment of God to be with you these six months, He will send you other messengers in due time. Now I must leave you, for I have other missions to perform. God’s blessings be with you. And now, I bid you farewell.”

D: Thank you, Paul and Alice, for sharing this testimony.

D: *A friend of mine asked if these experiences were really legitimate. He had access to certain statistics, which I inquired about. Their membership was about 105, ranging over an area of about a 45-mile radius. The average attendance on Sunday morning and Sunday evening had been 125. Wednesday evening attendance averaged between 85 and 90. Tithing statement filers ranged from 70-80%. Baptismal increase was 10%.*

Then I ask again, what do you think? Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” These principles are not too complicated—just obedience to the basic principles which Jesus taught of fasting and prayer, obedience to stewardship, obedience to the Word of Wisdom, and the endeavor to love each other.

I’ve found that this does work in other places as well. Taken to Osceola congregation in Iowa—the book membership was 25, average attendance from 4-10 on Sunday morning. This soon jumped to 25. Tithing statement filers jumped to 100%. Baptisms jumped to 25%. In Corydon, Iowa, a medium-sized congregation, the performance was very similar.

These worked, because they are the principles and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, in Section 76:

“For thus saith the Lord, I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end; great shall be their reward, and eternal shall be their glory; and to them will I reveal all mysteries; yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old; and for ages to come will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom; yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations; their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught; for by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will; yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man.”

And again from Section 81, paragraph 3:

“I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation. I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”

The key to success in these spiritual things lies in obedience to that which Jesus has taught us and taking advantages of the promises of His Holy Spirit, which He has said is available to us.

May God bless you as you seek to fulfill these promises.

[The testimony given by Paul Winans entitled "It Happened in Creston" appeared in the April 1st, 1965 issue of the *Saints' Herald*.]