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IMAGINE THAT

Preface

Beginning sometime around my 72nd year, my imagination really started to wake up again. I was reading *Dialogue with God*, by Mark and Patti Virkler, when wheels began to turn. In the weeks that followed I decided that this was a “do” book, not just a “read to learn” book. I began to do what the book suggested. Somewhere along the line I felt that the Lord gave me permission to experience the freedom of using my imagination to worship Him, to talk to Him, and more importantly to hear from Him.

I sensed encouragement as I read and practiced what I was reading. Now understand that, at that time, I had been walking with the Lord for 61 years. I wandered off the path from time to time but was always mercifully led back. I had the blessing of good Bible teachers in the church, and the Lord spoke even deeper truths to my heart as I applied those teachings. In this way, the Lord has helped me learn to identify truth, and occasionally error, through the years.

In the beginning I did not realize that my imagination was of any value to my spiritual transformation through mind renewal as promised in Romans 12:2. The more I practiced *Dialogue With God*, the more I sensed an awakening of something very familiar from deep within myself. It took me a while to recognize this as an asset.

To put this in perspective: I was 72 at the time of this awakening and still an active associate pastor on staff of a wonderful, Spirit-filled fellowship: New Covenant Church, in Valdosta, Georgia.

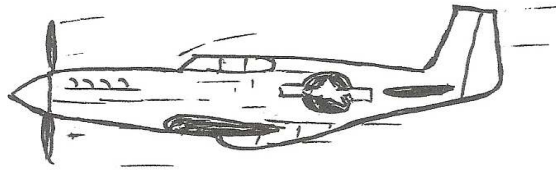
As this new imagination energy began to flow, I read the Bible with renewed eyes. I filled in color and sounds. I saw background and settings in my mind, s eye that made everything a much more interesting story. As the Virklers suggested in their book, I not only saw the words that Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, but it was as if I *heard* Him say them, and then heard her words back to Him. I could imagine being there, listening and watching. Isn't that supposed to happen when you read a great novel by a gifted author? I saw how the woman would try to get religious with Jesus and how He would bring her back to the real point. Of course I had read this story many times in the past. I understood the dialogue that they had with each other, but I had never felt as if I had been there. I'll tell you more about this experience later in the book.

For now, take a deep breath, try to relax, and see if the Lord will use my experience to give you a glimpse of a whole new dimension into His Kingdom that is to come—here, “on earth as it is in heaven.”

IMAGINE THAT!

CHAPTER ONE

Imagine



Imagination unrestrained

In my growing-up years I think that I had a very active imagination. I lived only one block from some woods where the undergrowth got very thick just a few steps off the road. I remember the Wilson boys, who were all older than I except for John, who dared each other, and of course, me and John, to swing out of a tree and drop into some heavy undergrowth. The idea was to turn loose and fall into the bushes about 8-10 feet below. I thought that if Tarzan's son, "Boy" could do it, why not me? I was very proud of my scratches and scars. I could pretend with the best of them back then.

Come on now, you remember when saying "let's pretend like" was a huge part of your vocabulary. You said it so often that it became *'tendlike!* "*Tendlike* I'm Roy and you're Gabby." "*Tendlike* I'm Gene and you're Frog." I suppose these *'tendlikes* are totally lost on those who don't know the Saturday matinee idols of the 40's and 50's. Your *'tendlikes* might have been John Wayne, Luke Skywalker, Indiana Jones, or Matthew McConahey. But the impact their character roles had on you illustrates that we are born with the ability to imagine. Why do we lose it with age?

Imagination tamed

Although it wasn't the intention of the educational system, it seems this wonderful imagination was sucked right out of me by facts and dates and computations. I don't remember one adult, especially a teacher, showing any interest in what my daydreams were about. They just said, "STOP IT! Pay attention, Jimmy!"

Whether it was the educational system, or just my desire to be like everyone else, I began to conform and be conformed. Clouds became clouds again—no longer castles, or horses, or huge airplanes... just clouds.

Imagination dims

One last vestige of my imagination lasted until World War II began. There was such a need for pilots that the government hired experienced civilian aviators at small airports all over the country to train them. Even my hometown, population 2,800, had such a program. Dormitories sprang up at every airport large enough to have them, and local civilian pilots were training our recently recruited military pilots. This was back in the day when good guys wore white hats. We all seemed to be on the same team.

The airport was close enough for a 12-year-old like me to ride his bike just outside of town, where I would lie for a long time in the grass near the runway and watch them "shoot" practice

landings. While just watching was fun, I really wished I was 23 or 24 years old and not just 12. I could even imagine myself becoming so good that the instructors would immediately see that I should be in one of the new P51 Mustangs escorting long-range bombers over Europe. These were the Mustangs with the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, the power plant that made the P51 just the greatest fighter ever! And of course I could imagine myself in the Mustang with the four 30-caliber and the four 50-caliber guns! My mind was full of dreams and interruptions of wonder—*but wait! The heavier armament meant more weight and more weight meant less speed, so what if...what if.* And just then another Cessna would come in low overhead at the Adel Airport and a new imagination would be born. *Was that Kenton Evans, the daring civilian flight instructor flying over? Did he just waggle his wings at me? I think he did!* IMAGINE THAT!

IMAGINE THAT!
CHAPTER 2
Imagination Revisited

Imagination sanctified

Being very imaginative as a child, I naturally thought of imagination as being childish rather than childlike. I avoided it or put it down as interference. In my sternest demon chasing voice I probably tried to rebuke it on occasion...or at least cast it down. When this old imagination machinery began to crank back up, I saw how mistaken I had been. Scriptures that had previously been too difficult to understand, or honestly had seemed kind of dull to me, now gained new meaning. Many Spirit-filled believers tried to explain to me how scripture suddenly came alive to them, and I could never quite grasp this phenomenon. Now here I am trying to explain the same thing. So, let me make the effort that so many others have made, but do it in the mindset of sanctified imagination and sanctified curiosity. *Sanctified*- To consecrate, to make pure or holy.

As I mentioned, scriptures that had been hard to understand really began to become clearer, however a more interesting thing to me was the expanding of the scriptures that I thought I did understand. In fact scriptures that I had taught and preached several times seemed to grow in quality and quantity. What had previously been a 30 to 40 minute sermon or teaching now became a series of teachings lasting several hours.

Imagination defined

One such passage of scripture has “captured” me for the last several years-- Romans 12:2. This passage has grown so much in me that I think this entire chapter can be used to cover just this one verse and, of course, related scriptures.

So that you might understand what I have for my “new” definition of *imagination*, let’s look in the dictionary. I will use the Merriam Webster Online. I do this to illustrate some biases against imagination.

1: the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality

2a: creative ability b: ability to confront and deal with a problem:

RESOURCEFULNESS. <use your imagination and get us out of here> c: the thinking or active mind: INTEREST <stories that fire the imagination>

3a: a creation of the mind; especially: an idealized or poetic creation. b. fanciful or empty assumption.

It’s interesting that it is only when one gets down to the sixth definition (3b), that a negative connotation appears: “fanciful or empty assumption.” Yet it seems that in today’s society, or at least in our Western culture, we have adopted this as its primary definition—that imagination is

fanciful and empty. We've passed over the other five positives to get to that negative.

Imagination discerned

There is a portion of scripture that, when read incorrectly, may actually reinforce the idea that imagination should be done away with. I am speaking of 2 Corinthians 10:3-5—especially verse 5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...(KJV)

Of course there are imaginations that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. Such imaginations should indeed be “*cast down.*” And that is exactly what this scripture is saying. It warns us to refuse anything that would argue with the truth of God. That’s why it is so necessary for us to be familiar with the Word of God, which for us is the knowledge of God. There are imaginations, however, that line up with the Word or knowledge of God. When we take captive those thoughts that are not in line with the Word, don’t we then have the freedom to imagine those thoughts that are in line with His Word, without doubting, without hesitation?

Imagination confirmed

A dear pastor-friend of mine in Waycross, Georgia—Roger Sumner—came to visit me during the writing of this book, and we had quite a discussion on this very verse. So appropriate and clear were his words that I secured his permission to include them here:

My tendency in the past has been that we should really not use the imagination when interpreting Scripture. I felt that we should lean upon the Holy Spirit to give us interpretations—and of course I still believe that. But what I didn’t know then is that our imaginations are an important part of the process! I didn’t realize that the Holy Spirit works in tandem with our creative minds.

The old mindset that caused me to be completely unimaginative in interpreting Scripture caused me to look at this verse (1 Corinthians 10:5) from an invalid perspective. The term “strong holds” in its Greek origin means “mindset.” So one of the things that the “weapons of our warfare” is to do is to pull down or tear down “mindsets.”

The next thing the “weapons of our warfare” do is to “cast down” or throw down “imagination.” This would seem to support the idea that man’s imagination has no part in spiritual matters. But let’s not throw out the baby with the bathwater! The “imagination” Paul speaks of here are the lofty ideas that oppose the truth about God, His character and His nature.

Notice that these weapons are only to be used against mindsets, imaginations and ideas that are opposed to the truth about God. It does not say that all mindsets are bad, or that all imaginations are bad, or that all ideas are bad.

It does not say we should never use our imaginations and minds. In fact, it liberates us to use imagination and ideas more freely because we have these “weapons of warfare” that help us guard against wrong ideas, mindsets—and imaginations about God.

And to that, I gave a hearty “Amen!”

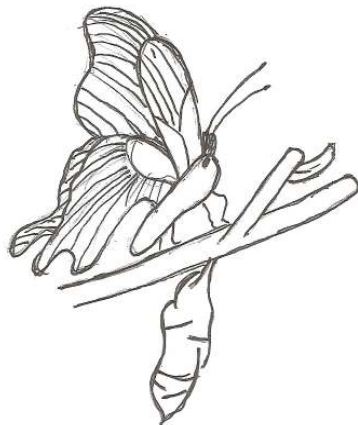
More imagination in scripture

The Bible affirms imagination even more literally in Romans 4:17 when Paul refers to faith-filled Abraham “...*calling those things that be not as though they were.*” That’s pretty close to Webster’s number-one definition, of imagination, which is “to form an image of something not present!”

Webster’s second definition speaks of “creative ability.” Certainly the creature—that’s us—created by the Creator, has creative abilities in his thought life. “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works...*” (Ephesians 2:10a). “*All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made*” (John 1:3). We are created in Him who was in creation—creating! We have to have creative ability in us somewhere! *Imagine that!*

Of course, the verse I love the most concerning imagination is, “*Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us,*” (Ephesians 3:20). Many translations and paraphrases interpret the word “think” as imagine. Is there power in imagination that is working in us? This verse of scripture sounds as if we have a powerful imagination and that God can out-imagine us! Do we dare let our imagination go unused when we pray believing that God will do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or imagine? Could He actually desire to do more than just barely squeeze out an answer to our prayer? Could He really be saying, “YES! I truly want to do that for you!”? WOW!!! IMAGINE THAT!

Are we now on the same page as to how I am using imagination and how my imagination is being used by God? Good, so let’s look at the wonderful Romans 12:2.



Transformation seen

“...*But be transformed by the renewing of you mind.*” This verse reminded me of the classic

worm-to-butterfly picture, for transformation is related to metamorphosis. The difference between a worm and a butterfly is pretty significant. I did not realize how significant until my wife and I took our 50th wedding anniversary at Callaway Gardens.

Callaway Gardens is a 13,000 acre family retreat in the southernmost foothills of Appalachia, near Pine Mountain, Georgia. We just wanted to kick back, eat well, and celebrate for a few days. (Take your family; it is worth it!) Somewhere on those 13,000 acres is the Cecil B. Day Butterfly Center. My wife Pat loves butterflies, so I generously gave of my time and took her. I was the one who had an eye-opening enjoyable experience.

The exhibit of butterflies began with a series of small glass enclosures that were about 3 or 4 feet square. The tops or ceilings of these enclosures were slanted from high in the front to lower in the back. This way you could see all the pupae or chrysalises just beginning their period of metamorphosis. They had already lived through the larva or caterpillar stages of their life. There were hundreds of these cocoons hanging from the “ceilings” of their small rooms.

As we walked past these displays we saw the stages of their development. One of the most amazing things is how vulnerable they are when the adult butterfly has emerged from its dark place but hangs helpless while its wings are yet soft and wet. It takes an hour or more for them fill the “struts” of their wings with blood and become stout enough for flight. In one cubicle they appeared to be just moist sticks hanging by their recently vacated homes. You could stand there and watch as these “wet sticks” stretch their wings as they were pumped to full size by their own circulation system. They then turned into beautiful flying creatures right before your very eyes.

The show!

The next room we entered had a ceiling of over 20 feet. The temperature was a steady 80 degrees. The butterflies from the northernmost origin could stand this as a maximum temperature and the ones from the southernmost origin could handle this as their coolest climate. The huge Brazilian butterflies were the most dazzling. They were giants! There were hundreds of specimens flying all around us in this open atrium.

My wife had on one of those ladies’ sun hats that had a butterfly pin on it. A lady turned to her and said, “You have a butterfly on your hat.” Pat nodded knowingly and said, “Yes.” The lady said, “No, you have a butterfly on your hat and so does he!” Two butterflies had landed on us and stayed with us for a few minutes. I did not see any on any of the other visitors in the Cecil B. Day Butterfly Center, but I really didn’t want to. This was something special for us. Do butterflies recognize 50th wedding anniversaries?

Have I helped you see metamorphosis as I experienced it? This was true revelation for me. I can never read Romans 12:2 again without this picture. God the Father wants us to be transformed into a beautiful butterfly-like creature. His plan is for us to be as different a person from who we used to be, as a butterfly is from a caterpillar.

Ask the next caterpillar that you meet if he would like to fly? His answer will be, “OH... It is all that I dream of!” Ask the next butterfly you see if he ever thinks about crawling. He will say, “Never!!!” (By the way, call me immediately when this happens.)

I hope that this personal experience has seemed more to you like a field trip for the understanding of

transformation and less like a preacher's rabbit trail. I need the common things that I do understand to illustrate the uncommon, holy, very spiritual things that I often don't understand.

Renewed-restored-renovated

Looking at this verse my imaginative curiosity causes me to question not what—for I knew *what* I should become-- but *how* do I become transformed? How can this worm crawl up into a cocoon, stay for a season, and come out a beautiful butterfly? As my curiosity, residing in the very center of my imagination began to ask questions, the verse itself began to unfold, revealing to me just what it meant to renew one's mind. I hope I can pass it on to you in the next few paragraphs.

Knowing that the English of the King James Bible is nearly 400 years old, and sometime very difficult for me to understand, I really wanted to know the full meaning of this word "renewing." I often go to a Greek-Hebrew dictionary to help with this language problem. I discovered that renewing means to *renovate*. Other resources defined it as *remodeling* or *refinishing*. I also found that the meaning is better understood if we see it in the way the Greek language would have expressed it, "*But be ye being renewed.*" The renewal of our minds was provided for us in the original gift of grace that we received in our rebirth, and it is to be a continual, ongoing, process. Perhaps you have heard it explained this way: You have been renewed, you are being renewed, and you will be renewed. As I type this I am *being* renewed. God is *renewing* me right now. You, if you are a believer, are *being* renewed right now!

IMAGINE THAT!

Another personal experience helped me to understand renewal or renovation in a way nothing else could have. I had to live it or maybe live in the middle of it to better grasp the real meaning of renewal or renovation or remodeling.

My wife and I live in a one-hundred-year old house. Thirteen years ago we started to make the necessary repairs in order to move back into it. When I say "move back", I am really referring to her. This is the home that Pat grew up in. Her family moved into this house when she was 7 years old. Our wedding presents were displayed in true southern fashion in what is now our dining room. It was from this house that we changed from wedding clothes to honeymoon clothes and started life together. Now here we were retiring and moving back.

We had served churches in Georgia, Florida and Alabama for almost 30 years, and this was to be our retirement home. We had purchased this house from her family and had rented it out for some 10 years. At this point I must confess... I flunked retirement. I went back to work as an associate pastor within six months. In those six months we lived in a fixer-upper. We got one or two rooms ready and moved in. We then lived and breathed renovation. We would finish one room and then move on to the next. At this point you can say with me, "Renovation revelation."

Renewing the mind

To move on to the next room you must open the door! I am beginning to see at this point in my life that the Lord is telling me that "renewing of my mind" is the renovation of all of the rooms of my mind. Creator God has made this marvelous thing called the mind. It can handle some of the most awful things and somehow we can still walk around as almost normal people coping with life. Only one thing though, He doesn't want us to just cope. He truly, truly wants us to overcome. You can hide some of the

most hideous things in the rooms of your mind. Some may be hideous things that you did, but more than likely it will be the terrible things that were done to you. If something traumatic happens to us, we have the ability and the tendency to open one of those closet doors of our mind, shove the trauma and the offender into the darkness and slam the door on that sucker!

It is not God's will for bad things to happen to you. All abuse is child abuse as far as Father God is concerned. His definition of abuse is broad in scope. When, by the will of man and not God, bad things do happen, God wants to step in and heal us from the trauma. However, you must invite Him into the room of your mind or soul where you have hidden that hurt.

It is God's will for good things to happen to you. He created you to need and receive love, nurture, support, affirmation and much more. Just the absence of these good things also causes trauma. If trauma is too big a word for you here, try this: You need what God intended for you to have. Without these things you have a lack in your life that He wants to supply. There are rooms inside of you that are still unfurnished with these necessities. He wants to supply you with these necessary things and thereby bring healing. He not only will take out some things in the rooms of your mind that don't belong-- but will in the refurnishing or renewing, put in those things that you have been lacking.

One example heard over and over is, "I have never had a physically comforting, appropriate hug from my father. Now I won't even let him touch me! How can an invisible God supply that lack? The answer is simple...supernaturally!!! I have seen it happen dozens and dozens of times right before my very eyes. By the way, I don't close my eyes when I pray in these kinds of situations. I don't want to miss what the Lord is doing.

We shut the closet doors on our lack of the good things, on our sins, on the sins committed against us and we think that we are okay. When asked, "How are you doing?" Here in the south we say "Fine... and you?" We are really just coping. Now don't get me wrong. I am glad that we can cope...at least until real help comes. Do you realize that a sudden outburst of anger, or a yielding to a surprise temptation, or anything that causes you to have a thousand-dollar reaction to a ten-dollar incident, is the enemy kicking open that closed door for just a second and the stench coming out? That is where all the bitterness, resentment and such, festers. More than that, it rots.

Beginning mind renewal

My imaginative curiosity began to ask more questions. When did this renewal or renovation start in our minds? More personally, when did my own mind renewal begin? Exactly what initiates it? I thought, "Surely it had to start with my rebirth!" It certainly couldn't have been before. If it started with my rebirth, and I was reborn in the Spirit years ago, has not some of my mind already been renewed, or at least has been in the process of being renewed? Does this mean that some of my imagination could be coming out of the renewed portion of my mind? Can't you tell when some of your imagination is not pleasing to God? Of course you can. Then can I not presuppose that you can also tell when your imagination is okay with God? No? Think about it.

To make the case that mind renewal began at the moment of rebirth, look at this evidence: "*Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new*" (2 Corinthians 5:17 KJV). Did this happen to you all at once? Did all the old things, like dark thoughts and desires pass away immediately? Not for me. But praise God they *are passing away*.

“And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10 KJV). Here again the Bible scholars tell us that the word renewed is originally expressed as “being renewed...renovated...restored.”

“So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:8-9).

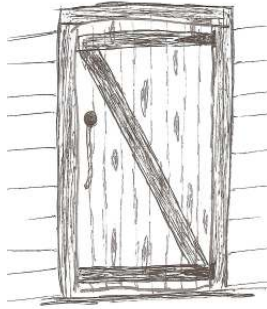
Salvation (real, not imagined)

So this begs the question, “Are you His?” The Gospel of John makes this easy to answer. *“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God. Even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:11-12 KJV).* When we believe and receive what He did for us, we become His.

Have you received Him? Yes? Good! Pray for all those who answered “No” to that question. And if you answered No, you need not wait for a more convenient moment to receive Christ! One way to acknowledge that you believe and receive is to pray this prayer from your heart: *Lord Jesus, I come now to receive you as my Lord and Savior. I believe that you have already paid the price for all my sins. I now confess and repent of these sins and of my rebellious ways and of my independence. Thank you for saving me. Let your Holy Spirit now come. Let my transformation begin.*

There is SO MUCH love and mercy and grace flowing toward you right now that this all seems too easy. That’s because He has done everything that is necessary for you to come to Him. Now that you are His, you have Christ living in you, and you can better understand the things of the Spirit.

Remember that *by the renewal of your mind* means by the renovation or remodeling of your mind. In our old home we would finish one room and then go to the next. We would open the door, walk in, survey the need and then start. We would take out the furniture, strip the floors and make whatever preparations necessary to make this room livable for us. I am seeing that the Lord wants to do the same thing in our transformation process. He wants to renovate or renew that next room or closet in our minds or souls, which we have shut off to Him and probably to all others. As I was praying through all this and asking for revelation the Lord gave what I thought were strange instructions.



The door

One morning during my quiet time I imagined that the Lord told me to go to my shop and build a door. I have a small wood working shop behind the house. I have adequate power tools to do most things... but build a door? I can go buy one in a casing and brace it up to be a full size illustration. It might make a rather interesting pulpit for the preacher to present such an object lesson. I sensed that the Lord said, "Make a miniature door." Knowing that the next congregation that I was to speak to was small, I knew this would be wise.

As I began to make the door I realized that I was to take my time. The hours spent in the shop would be a time of worshiping with my hands. During that same time I was seeing more in Romans 12:2 than I had seen previously. That's really the way it's supposed to be isn't it? Every time you study a verse more light should come. Also the thought of Jesus the carpenter, in the shop with me, was enough to keep me going back again and again.

I have brought the door into my office for inspiration. As I look at it my first thought is, "Me and Jesus made that." The day I went into the shop to start building it I imagined the Lord saying, "Make it out of scraps." I thought, "Why not, that's all You had to use when you rebuilt us Lord". I had a stack of cutoffs by my table saw. There were a few pieces of trim and plywood left over from previous projects. I sensed that one piece of scrap was large enough for the door itself. I trimmed it to dimensions that were approximately to scale.

I believed that I was to make this door so that no one could enter from the outside unless invited. There was not to be a knob or handle on the outside. I sensed that the Lord wanted to be the only one to open it. He would do that only by invitation. The picture of an old, frontier-cabin-type door came to mind. A door that had a latch string that could be put through a hole to the outside for entrance, or it could be pulled in for privacy. The latch string is attached to an arm on the inside that fits into a bracket for a lock. Until the latch string is on the outside, the door is locked. If the latch string is out, one can pull it and the bar comes up out of the bracket, and the door comes open. Whoever is on the outside can come in.

I used a router to make the smooth plywood door look like miniature planks. I found some cabinet hinges that I painted black. Then I framed it with scrap 1X2 trim. As I began to think about the frame, I realized that the door jambs would need to be on the inside of the door frame. The door had to open out to illustrate my point. I further realized that this would have made those real frontier doors much harder to break down. Just think about it. Go up to a door that opens toward you. See, the jamb or trim that is on the other side? Can you imagine how hard that would have been to kick in if they had used timbers such as 2X4s for their stops or jambs? I mounted our miniature door and frame on a piece of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood for stability.

If I have gone into too much detail about the door for some of you, just forgive me and read on. I wrote this description for all of the men and women who know what it is like to feel wood, smell glue and walk around in sawdust. May I add, just like Jesus did?

Ongoing renovation

It is the desire of your heavenly Father to renew (renovate) every room in your mind and soul. He will only open the door to the next room by invitation. Yes, there is always a next room. When you put out the latch string and invite Him into that room, He opens the door, comes in, removes all that is in it, and totally renovates it. He will even ask you to assist. You can count on it. Some things in there He will ask you to throw out. Then he furnishes it with what should have been in there all the time. There is new paint, new carpet, windows that let in His light, and a very joyous, healing atmosphere...and forevermore it has the fragrance of the Holy Spirit. It is not just decorated or remodeled, it is renovated!

IMAGINE THAT!