

## Messages For Bushnell

In 1867, at the home of a family in Bushnell, Michigan, U.S.A., the chairs were arranged in the front room for the church service. We don't know the family's name, but we'll call the father and mother Mr. and Mrs. Hill. There was no real preacher for the church service. Each farmer in the little company of Sabbath keepers took a turn at speaking on Sabbaths. Some could hardly read, and one mumbled so you couldn't hear what he said at all. The little group at Bushnell had dwindled to almost nothing in the past few weeks. Some who had been baptized last year were already working on Sabbaths and using tobacco again. Many of the group were thinking that they should give up these house meetings.

Two more families arrived in their wagons, and from the way the women strolled toward the house, it didn't seem like they were too eager to attend.

When everyone had assembled in the parlor, there were only seven adults. They did their best to sing accompanied by the old pump organ, but the singing didn't sound very good. One of the men led out in the lesson study, and another mumbled along for an hour about the sanctuary. The younger children became restless.

When the meeting had ended, the members must have had a conversation something like this.

"It's no use. We shouldn't try to hold meetings any more. Most of our group have dropped out and we can't get a preacher. I think we ought to call it quits."

Another nodded reluctantly. "I've held the meetings here as long as folk would come," he said, "but they're getting to be more of a burden than a blessing. I'm willing to call this the last meeting if you are."

Everyone agreed quickly, and it was settled. Next week they wouldn't have a meeting.

The visiting families had climbed into their buggies and prepared to leave when the mail arrived at the house. Mr. Hill sat down and thumbed through the papers. The largest was the new *Review*, and he scanned the back page for late news. There he was startled to find this announcement: "Grove Meeting. Providence permitting, there will be a Grove Meeting at Bushnell, Michigan . . . on Sabbath and Sunday, July 20 and 21. All those within a day's ride of Bushnell are urged to attend. A baptism and ordination will be held. The best grove nearest to the waters should be selected and well seated. As this young church is small, those coming must be nearly prepared to take care of themselves. James White."

Mr. Hill hurried to tell the others before they left. This news took the little group by surprise. "How can we have a grove meeting when we just agreed to disband?"

"We can't," they decided. "We'll have to keep going. It's only next weekend." And perhaps they thought it wouldn't be too bad to have a real preacher. Apparently James White was planning to come himself.

The faithful believers kept very busy that week. They invited those nearby who had stopped attending. They cut down logs for benches and dragged them to the meeting site. By Friday things looked quite nice, and the first arriving visitors had begun to pitch their tents under the trees nearby.

On Sabbath morning, 20 of the Bushnell group met at the Grove meeting, and many more had come from Greenville, Allegan, and Orleans. Elder and Mrs. White arrived for the meetings, and excitement filled the air. When Elder White rose to preach, many felt that for once the meeting would be interesting. By the close of the weekend, the Bushnell believers were so encouraged that they begged the Whites to come back the next weekend to hold another grove meeting. James White agreed, and word spread that a meeting would be held again July 26.

As wagons rolled in the next Sabbath, everyone was so enthusiastic, and Mrs. White planned to speak. When she rose during church and began to explain a Bible passage, even the children listened. To their surprise, she paused—laid aside her Bible—and began speaking especially to the Bushnell members. Her talk went something like this:

"I am looking into the faces of some who were shown to me in vision two years ago. Today your experiences come back clearly to my mind, and I have a message for you from the Lord. That brother over there near the pine tree—I can't call your name for I haven't been introduced to you, but your face is familiar and your experience stands out clearly before me." Then she spoke about how the man had left God out of his life, and she told him that he would be truly happy only if he lived the kind of life God could bless.

Turning to a woman she said, "This sister sitting by Mrs. Maynard from Greenville, I can't speak your name either. But I know your problems." She encouraged the woman to be faithful to God in spite of opposition.

"Then this brother back by the oak tree. Many things have come into your life to discourage you, brother. Your family is giving you a difficult time." As she went on to describe his difficulties, the man nodded in amazement.

From one person to another she went, telling them what she had been shown of their lives two years earlier. Some she reprovved for wrong doing. Others she commended for faithfulness. To all she brought a message of God's love and a plea to return completely to Him.

When she had finished, she sat down. Elder Strong leaped to his feet.

"I have to know if what Sister White has been saying is true," he declared. "The Whites are visitors and don't know us at all. Yet Sister White tells us that she saw us in vision and she had messages for us individually. Are all the things she said true, in every single case? Or has she made mistakes? I want to know right now."

One by one the people stood. The man by the pine tree said that Mrs. White had described his life better than he could have done it himself. He confessed his sins and said that he intended to return to keeping God's Sabbath. The others stood to testify, all affirming that Mrs. White had told the truth, and confessing their wrongs before their brethren.

As the testimonies ended, Mrs. White and Elder Strong together appealed for the congregation to rededicate themselves to God. Many rose and made their way to the

front. They had felt God's spirit in this meeting, and it had convinced them of the Creator's personal concern for every individual.

That afternoon twelve new members were baptized into the church. The old members voted to organize the house meetings into a regular church company. Quickly they signed their names on the roll of members, and before the day was out, they had elected officers. From that day on the Bushnell, Michigan, church was one of the most active in the conference and soon had its own regular pastor.

I can imagine that two of those Bushnell members might have spoken to each other like this: "What do you think of Mrs. White? Is she really a prophet?"

"She surely is," the other declared firmly. "Only God could have given her such specific knowledge about the Bushnell members. She made religion come alive for me. Church services that were boring are now interesting. It comes from my new relationship with God, and Ellen White helped me to find that relationship. As far as I'm concerned, she's a messenger from God, and I thank Him for her ministry in Bushnell."

#### References:

This story is adapted from *The Spirit of Prophecy Emphasis Stories*, vol. 3, by Norma Youngberg, Fern Babcock, The Ellen G. White Estate, and The General Conference Department of Education (1982), pp. 182-187. It was based on the following documents: "A Remarkable Test," *The Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1878; "Report from Brother White," *Review and Herald*, August 13, 1867; "Grove Meeting," *Review and Herald*, July 16, 1867; Spirit of Prophecy Day Sermon, 1974.