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# Dedication

To my God, Author and giver of all good things, and especially my husband, John, without whose total acceptance of me as a person, I would never have come through.

# Acknowledgements

The Bible NIV, without which I would never have discovered truth for myself.

The Holy Spirit – the interpreter, the revealer to the heart, of the Word of God.

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# INTRODUCTION

At age 61, why does one begin a first book? I think each one of us has a life story – a *raison d'être* in the divine scheme of things and a longing to tell it. Some of us achieve "greatness" in this world's eyes, but some of us live out "good" lives from day to day, with its griefs and its triumphs and mostly routine in-betweens, with no real sense of having achieved anything. We have run into "fences" which we go around (usually the long way) or search for a gate (or way through) or thirdly, which we just climb over, either easily or with great difficulty, depending on the height of the fence.

In this book I am writing my personal story because I realise now all the problems and frustrations in my life are fences, and because I believe passionately that God is good all the time, especially to those who trust in him, I want to use incidents in my life as illustrations of why the fences are there, and how I could have dealt with them much better and more quickly if I had known then what I have learned so painfully over all these years until now – that to take offence is to build a "fence". Jesus warned us very clearly that things that cause us to take offence would come (Luke 17:1 & Matthew 18:7) and that blessed (or not only happy, but in the flow-on power of God) is the person who does NOT take offence (Matthew 11:6). Unfortunately even though I thought of myself as a Christian, I used to have no understanding of these verses. The apostle Paul warns about being worldly-minded (1 Corinthians 3:1-3 & Titus 2:12) but the average people who call themselves Christians are like this nevertheless.

The disaster of this worldly-mindedness is that the "world" is looking for the reality of the changed life that a Christian should exhibit (Romans 12:1,2 & 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 & 2 Corinthians 6:3 etc.), and is using our worldliness as an excuse to have nothing to do with the gospel, even though it really is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

Now if you are already offended by what I have said, I have already proved my point. However, kind reader, if you are willing, please read on. I pray and trust God will indeed bless you as you read of my mistakes and God's solutions, thus avoiding at least some of the pitfalls and unhappiness and frustration of a powerless Christian life. Indeed, God promises (2 Corinthians 1:4) that you WILL be comforted.

## CHAPTER ONE – Pre-Christian Childhood

My parents were very good, hard-working people and I was not only first born in my family but first grandchild on both sides. On one side was a traditional Christian but divorced grandmother and the other non-churchgoing, but strong Judeo-Christian ethic, a culture which always knew the "right" thing to do. My parents thought it was important that I was "christened". I believe they walked in the light of what they believed was right before God. I think the traditional Christian idea is that this would earn God's favour towards the child.

It is so interesting to me that God sees any move towards Him as a step of faith, no matter how small, and He meets that with His own love and grace (Hebrews 11:6), and begins to work according to the desires expressed.

I was sent to Sunday school, but after the "infant" years I began to hate it, and used to wait outside, until all the children came out to go home. I cannot remember at all why I hated it, but I can remember I had a very special friend, whom I called Baba, with whom I communicated for advice about all sorts of things in a special language, that I called "Jibberjabber". Baba only told me good things to do, and I told him all the secrets of my heart. He was a very special and good friend and intensely real to me, even though he was "imaginary".

As I look back to this memory again it makes me realise how good and gracious the Heavenly Father, Abba, is, who finds His own ways to communicate with those whom He has already called (Romans 8:28), yet how He respects our free will and also the unique way He has made each one of us. I was only about 6 years old at this time, but as I think about the significance of this, it is not surprising that I have always known that God is good, and that no matter what life dealt out, God is still good. I can really see and believe that He gently steers us towards our destiny, yet allows us complete freewill to make our own choices. He sets us in families, even ones that do not desire to have a close relationship with Him, for His own divine reasons.

As a child, I did not know about a God who wanted to have a relationship with His highest creation, humans. I only knew one was

supposed to be good, which was very difficult because I was intensely curious and also "different" in that I could not conform to what everyone expected.

Eventually, of course, this attitude led to my first serious mistake in life – I stole a chocolate block from a shop on my way to school, got caught and had to pay for the chocolate over a period of 8 weeks with my whole pocket money every week. The ensuing disgrace, the sense of being BAD and the shame affected my inner life for many years. Others eventually forgot about it and life went on, but inside I was scarred and it was all my own fault. I lived with this self-blame and the shame of being a no-good person for years, not having any knowledge at all of how to "clean" one's insides.

Nevertheless, I started learning ballet, and I was good at that, so I was able to quell the BAD and shameful feelings.

Perhaps some children are less sensitive than I was, but if a child is not taught from a young age that Jesus forgives sins, the weight of being "bad" is very overwhelming to the spirit. I know that some children have been labelled BAD by teachers or even just NAUGHTY by parents or teachers. I believe this is one of the most disastrously scarring things that can happen to a child. They seem to feel shame and blame very deeply and can be totally defeated. I know children can do very naughty things, but they need to know that though they must be punished for their wrongdoing, yet Jesus has already taken the punishment for their sin on the Cross, and that He, by the indwelling Holy Spirit will forgive and enable them not to make the same mistake again. They need to know, just as adults do, that if we

confess our sin He is faithful and just, to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Children are so precious to Jesus (Matthew 18:1-6) and we ought to help them guard their hearts too (Proverbs 4:23) by introducing them to Him at an early age. My own children were only 3 or 4 years old, but they loved having a heavenly friend, even though the relationship was not always close as they grew older, by their own choices (though He continues faithful). If we have this confidence in Jesus' love ourselves they gladly receive and believe it (Proverbs 14:26).

Many people think that it is OK for children to be pointed in this direction and that they can choose later, but the Bible is absolutely accurate when it says to train a child (Proverbs 22:6).

In my experience, missing out on this training and encouragement of the Word of God at an early age set in motion a predisposition to offence, because shame and self-blame are so painful that one has to work out how to ease it, but not knowing the message of the gospel, one climbs over the "fence", but the load is not removed and accumulates over the years. Hebrews 12:1-12 warns us about carrying baggage, but it takes a long time to effectively off-load, because the longer one carries it, the stronger it shapes one's life.

I am saying these things in the first chapter because many of my friends went through traumatic counselling sessions to off-load baggage, but the only Counsellor one needs is the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, and a strong desire to be obedient to both. In fact, true humility is agreeing wholeheartedly with what God says in His Word,



and being renewed to conform to that (Romans 12:1,2). I have witnessed those whose lives were challenged by this truth at an early age, and practised it, that they are extraordinarily free, as the Bible promises, to walk close to God (John 8:32).

Well, I did not have this training then, but I can ask Jesus to restore "what the locust has eaten", and you, reader, can do the same.

## CHAPTER 2 – Teenage years

We hear and read a lot about difficult teenage years, both for parents and for the teenager, and I was probably no different from my parents' perspective; except perhaps for one thing – I had begun ballet classes at age 12, which rapidly developed into a consuming passion, through which I also developed purpose and perseverance. These qualities, which were "trained" into me from such an early age, I believe, were a gift from God, that I would need very much to sustain me through my development and preparation for my destined service for God, though I could not have had any concept of this at the time. Again it demonstrates God's faithfulness to His commitment to us (Philippians 1:6). My parents generously supported and encouraged me in this pursuit, but it was really an escape from reality and into dreams

of being famous, successful, rich and beautiful. The hard work and commitment involved was worth it, a small price to pay in order to achieve such a wonderful dream.

Of course there was reality as well. Because I had won a scholarship at an exclusive church school there was pressure to succeed in fields of learning, meet certain expectations and to conform to a "standard" which I found I was unable to meet. The dream world of ballet became more attractive still, especially as uniqueness was encouraged, whereas at school, conformity was required, and too much deviation was punished.

The Bible talks about fear having to do with punishment (1John 4:18b), so I began to develop fear in reality and joy in my dream world, where my uniqueness was encouraged. It is only as I look back to see how terrible the path was that I chose in my ignorance, even though everything looked OK on the surface.

How can any teenager, developing their life values, changing from child to adult, from dependence to independence, live without Jesus, the unconditionally loving and stable friend? Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18a), but multitudes of teenagers do not have this friend.

I was divinely protected by having ballet as my dream world where I could be unique. Many teenagers get into gangs or take drugs or alcohol to get into the dream world. My rebelliousness developed in my heart, but others rebel openly and against society's norms. But whether hidden or open, rebelliousness puts up "fences" of self-protection, self-justification, self-will etc., where the truth is that

God is our protector, Jesus has justified us with His shed blood, and the will and way of God is the only thing that gives life.

As I wrote in the previous chapter, I was already carrying "baggage" – shame, blame and pain – but it is easy to bury this into the subconscious when one is young. There is loads of room on the "hard drive" of one's heart so it does not necessarily show up outwardly. Because God has a unique plan and purpose for each one of us, I do not believe He likes us choking up our hearts with negative and unresolved issues and experiences. He is so good, kind and merciful, and does His best to help us respond to His open arms.

There was one incident of rebelliousness that turned out to be particularly disastrous to my spirit during this time. I had not yet become a Christian, and because I was already prone to take offence, I was deeply offended by a visiting clergyman who threw chalk at naughty students. I decided to set him up with a trick of deception. I put the cover of a banned book around my Bible and held it up to provoke him. He fell into the trap, of course, and because he did not have a sense of humour I was given detention. What I did not realise was that God had given me the gift of intuition for His purpose, not for the flesh or the devil to use. God also defends His own, no matter whether they have a good sense of humour or not, so I had actually set myself against God with the gift He had given me. Of course I had no understanding of what I had done in the eternal scheme of things; that this began for me a lifelong struggle with authority in the church, and it was many, many years before I

had a revelation of what I had done, so that I could repent of it and be cleansed of its taint (1 John 1:9).

At about 14 years of age someone invited me to a church fellowship and I began to attend. Not long after I started going along regularly, an evangelistic mission was held at the church and I heard, at age 16 for the first time, that Jesus died to forgive our sins, so we can go to heaven. Well, I had committed sins and especially that chocolate block failure that had made me a bad person inside for all those years, so I went forward at the invitation and gave my life to Jesus. I only knew to apply the same values I had learned to apply to ballet – passion, perseverance and purpose. I wanted to be the best Christian I could be, and I went to every event I could. I joined the choir and did everything that I thought, or was told to do – read the Bible, pray, attend church, tithe etc., etc. Somehow I missed, or they did not explain the gospel quite right – the gospel is about being loved by Jesus and loving him in response – having a relationship with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is not primarily about DOING things for Him, no matter how worthy and "good" these things are. I do not remember hearing anything about letting God work in me, so I very quickly fell from grace into law (Galatians 5:4), but in my earnestness, I never knew, and nobody ever told me. All this "DO" quickly led to a sense of failure, striving and futility, but the fellowship of people was fun, so it was easy to cover up my disappointment and keep on going, while ballet continued to be my dream world of joy and hope of success.

I wanted to leave school to pursue this ballet career, but my father wanted me to finish – to have qualifications to "fall back on", but I do not think he ever realised that the school inculcated superiority, and values where serving was menial, and being a "cut" above other people was to be aspired to. Though it was a supposedly Christian school, certainly at that time they taught nothing about the call or gifts of God in one's life, and that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Unfortunately I came to despise the school for this offence, because I did not know how to handle it. Though I had been told to pray, I did not know that prayer has the power to change things, so I continued in offence – another sin or weight we are warned not to carry (Hebrews 12).

I did love the choir at church, and had a wonderful time in fellowship with the Christians, but my mother, particularly, thought I had gone "overboard" in my Christian commitment. I really loved God and the Bible (and still do), and had no problem embracing it as true in every respect, even if I did not understand it. I loved (and still do) learning all the stories and promises, but I was not taught how to appropriate them for my life, even though I gave willing intellectual assent to every word. I was acquiring knowledge at a great rate, but it was not dealing with my insecurity, and it was not changing my life, even though I really expected it to do so. When things did not go right I did not know how to apply God's word to deal with the situation, and was angry and frustrated. As I remember it, prayer was offered mainly for other people, because it was pride to pray for oneself.

Where I got this idea from I do not know, but prayer seemed to me at the time to be presenting a "shopping list" of other people's needs to God.

All these strange ideas were what I picked up in my formative years as a Christian, and I embraced them because I did not know any better. I do not know if these ideas are prevalent in some churches today, because I do not fellowship in hypocritical and "religious" churches any more. Jesus makes it very plain that He does not like them either!

Of course I realise now that a lot of this is not biblical Christianity at all, but it has taken me a long time to undo these foundations. That is why I believe it is so important to teach children in particular, and also young people who want to follow Jesus, about the Holy Spirit's work in one's life, and about having a personal relationship with Jesus, listening to His voice and loving Him and letting Him love you – that prayer actually arises in this relationship, not as a religious act. I feel so much for people who have been taught or picked up "religion", rather than understanding how God always meant our fellowship with Him to be, especially through their schooling – their formative years. It is so sad that some have even quit on God, because the belief system they were taught did not work. I long to help people come back to their first love – not a God who is far off and uninterested, but One who so longs to be close to His people. After all, He sacrificed His only Son to pay the death penalty for Adam's and Eve's rebellion with which every person born since has been tainted.

I did not quit the church even through my disappointments and troubles. I truly believe the words of Jesus when He said that He would build His church and that the gates of hades would not overcome it (Matthew 16:18). However, I had a long, hard road ahead. I had read that He will refine us (Zechariah 13:9), but I had no idea what that meant, and I was trying so hard to be a good Christian, that I am sure other people needed to put a fence up against me, as I developed self-righteousness and self-justification to help me in my insecurity.

## CHAPTER 3 – Single Days

Singleness should be a carefree time? That is a great snare! Without any knowledge of the call of God – one's purpose for being in this world, and one's destiny, which gives the satisfaction in life, it is a recipe for waywardness and self-seeking. It is very easy to pursue goals that will actually lead nowhere or to disaster and futility. The Bible says that without vision people perish (Proverbs 29:28). It is best to come to Jesus at an early age so one knows where one is going, career-wise, and in one's life partnership particularly.

Because I was in Christian fellowship and my friends at least wanted to follow God's way in this regard, we used to go out in groups and have a great time without the emotional pressures of

being paired off. I know that in some youth groups there is pressure in this regard, but by God's grace it was not so for me. I went out a few times with young men in my late teens but I was not interested in encouraging anything except normal friendship, so I was able to keep free of emotional entanglements and the consequent temptations. Music was a very big part of my life in Christian circles, and after I left school I studied ballet full-time. Ballet classes and ballet practice consumed most of my days and evenings, including Saturdays. I was so busy that I did not really have time for much else except church on Sunday morning and evening, and fellowship on Sunday afternoon. There was a tremendously ego-satisfying three months when I was chosen to be in a small ballet company which toured NSW and some of Queensland – write-ups and photos in the newspapers and the excitement of travelling to small towns in a very big pantechicon to carry the dancers, scenery and costumes. We were fêted, admired and billeted by beautiful local people and it was a little taste of fame. But this was the "plus" side, because striving was already a part of my life – aiming for impossible standards which were actually no part of God's ideal plan for my life, and were therefore unattainable. This bred frustration which gave rise to envy and competitiveness, and the need to pull others down so that I could rise. I deceived myself about these unchristian traits, but God in His infinite goodness saw, and I began to find that I was not psychologically stable enough to cope with life in the theatre. Though I did not know it, unless God is blessing and protecting constantly, a life where you are a different character, playing a part all the time, can cause vulnerable and



sensitive people to lose their real identity and not know who they really are, that is, how God made them. I feel such a compassion for film stars and actors who have gone so far down this road that they cannot form stable relationships.

Well, in my case, God worked all things for my good because He loves me, but the circumstances were not exactly to my liking. Somehow the church conveyed to me that I could not be both a dancer and a Christian. I think the church in those times had a bit of a hang-up about it, but probably it was a generalisation from my own observations. This is not to say that God does not call Christians into the theatre (that is patently untrue), but one would need to be sure that God was the initiator of such a calling, because He does not bless selfish ambition and vainglory (Galatians 5:26 & Philippians 2:3).

As I remember, I asked God for a specific physical sign, which actually came to pass. Then I found there were no jobs available for me in the ballet world. I had tried teaching ballet in some country towns by invitation of a local patron of the Arts, but I did not really like teaching at that time.

My father suggested that I get a "regular" job, and arranged for me to work in a clerical position in an insurance company (he was in insurance himself and enjoyed it), but I absolutely LOATHED it and left after three months to obtain a position of my own choice in a chemist shop. I found that I enjoyed selling and relating to people, so I began to consider going to University to study Pharmacy, and because I had obeyed my father's request to complete my school qualifications, I did actually apply to the University for the course.

However, God had other plans which He was about to reveal to me. I still loved church, choir, fellowship and reading the Bible and I still had a great hunger to pursue God. I had made a decision to follow Him, rather than follow a ballet career, but what I did not realise was that I had transferred my ambitions from ballet to recognition and fame in the church. I was in for a lot more "disciplining" (Hebrews 12:5), but one only realises these things with hindsight.

## CHAPTER 4 – Hunger for God

Has the reader, at this point, identified with any of my struggles? (Romans 7). Perhaps the situations are different but the principles are similar or even the same, and the evil one looks for vulnerabilities which he can tempt.

I have repeatedly said how good God is. I have always believed this as truth – in fact I do not think I have ever doubted it. This is a God-given major strength in my life. No matter how many mistakes I have made, I do thank God that He has given me this gift of belief that He is good ALL THE TIME. This belief has kept me pursuing Him, so that I have kept my life-line to Him intact all my life and all the time. He promises to NEVER leave us, but if we were to doubt the truth of His goodness, it would be very easy to let go of Him, to lose the sense of His presence and His constant love.

I really loved church and fellowship, learning about God, singing the classical church music in the choir, and singing the old choruses. The words were sometimes old-fashioned but they expressed well enough the things I wanted to say to God. Many of these hymns and choruses expressed exactly what I wanted in my relationship with God, and I sang them from my heart with absolute sincerity –

*Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee –*

*Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth, longing for thy gracious word –*

*Come down, O love divine, seek thou this soul of mine, and visit  
it with thine own ardour glowing –*

*How I praise thee, precious Saviour, that thy love laid hold of me.  
Thou has saved and cleansed and filled me, that I might thy  
channel be. Channels only, blessed Master, but with all thy  
wondrous power flowing through us thou canst use us every day  
and every hour.*

*Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea,  
Lord, thy love at last has conquered, grant me now my  
supplication, none of self and all of thee.*

These are some of the words which meant so much to me in those early days after I asked Jesus to come into my heart. I went to church as often as I could and to any other meetings where I could learn more. It seemed I could never get enough, yet there was always something that eluded me. The hidden truth was that I hated living, and more specifically I did not know how to live for God. I knew for certain that I would go to heaven when I died, but God had called me to live for Him, not to die. Jesus had died to give me life, but I actually had come to desire heaven, rather than a Christian life here on earth. The church was quick to teach that suicide would keep you

out of heaven (though I do not believe our God is legalistic in this matter), but the same teachers did not teach us how to live a victorious Christian life, in His strength, changing from one degree of glory to another – our legal standing before God is righteous, because of the shed blood of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in our lives to help us to live holy. I was continually failing to meet the proclaimed standards for a Christian. I could see that others could not keep the standards either, but many pretended to, or justified their failures. The greater my sense of failure when I only wanted to please God, whom I instinctively loved, the more thoughts of living in heaven became attractive. I could not bear the thought that I was failing God, yet I could not go to heaven unless He took me (suicide not being an option, as previously mentioned). I did not realise that I had lost sight of the real gospel, and that I had fallen from grace into law (Galatians 5:4). I tried the self-righteousness path, compromise (ie, lowering God's standards), but these did not feel right. I loathed hypocrisy as much as the world does of the church, and Jesus warns us so strongly about. I really loved God's word and I grasped what I could plainly understand – the things that Jesus said, and tried to live by these principles, but the only way I could see to move forward was to DO things for God. I did not realise, and no-one at this time helped me to see that this does not please or honour Jesus, who wants us to do the works He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10), because He knows how easy it is for us to become performance-oriented. Soon my hunger for God Himself became hunger for God's "well done", which He could not give because He never asked me to do those things to

please Him in the first place. This increased my sense of failure and desperation. I had lost sight of the fact that loving Him pleased Him, and exercising faith in Him pleases Him too (Hebrews 11:6).

It is a great irony that my hunger for God increased because of wrong beliefs. But God is always good – with the testing He will make a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

There was a chink in any young woman's armour – a young, handsome Christian boyfriend!

I cannot really finish this chapter of my life, without adding that it is so interesting to look back from 40 years on, to see the stupid mistakes that one can make in ignorance. It is good to be in a church that teaches young people the truth – seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (not self-righteousness or "earned" righteousness, through works to score "brownie" points), that not only teaches this but has leaders who model this – that worshipping Jesus and letting Him love you and lead you is most important. He has done everything that we need. He has saved us and imputed His righteousness to us by His grace. The implanted hunger for God is directed to His presence in our lives, letting Him change us from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18) by the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:1,2), not striving, but resting in Him, listening to His voice. The words of the hymns and choruses that so inspired me in worship were actually a more reliable guide than the words and actions of some mentors and teachers.

It is also so important to understand the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, which my teachers of that time did not understand either –

no wonder the apostle, Paul, warns us to pray for our teachers and leaders. These faulty foundations caused me a lot of grief in the ensuing years, where my Christian faith did not give me the victory over sin that I should have had.

Jesus said "I am the bread of life". Sometimes He seems to ask us to wait to receive our answers – stretches us a bit, and teaches us perseverance and trust. I learned a poem a long time ago which inspired me. It was by John Milton. The last line is "they also serve who only stand and wait".

Yes, God is always good, and faithful to His commitment to us. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied (Matthew 5:6).

## CHAPTER 5 – Life Partnership

I was only 22 years old – very naïve – but I had decided to go to University, as previously stated. It was just at this time that I met John. He was very shy of girls, very good-looking and a very keen Christian. We met in rather "coincidental" circumstances while I was working in the Pharmacy as a shop assistant. We quite quickly discovered we had common interests, particularly our love of Jesus, and hunger for God. I also realised he was interested in finding a wife, while I was more interested in planning a career. He came to

believe that God had planned that we should marry. We had only been friends for a few months, and had actually only gone out together in a group, although he had met me during my lunch breaks a few times too. I found his offer very flattering, but I had no idea how one was supposed to choose a partner for life (I believed marriage is a partnership for life). He was a lovely person, a great friend and fun to be with, but I think I thought, like movies etc. suggest, that one was supposed to be passionate about the one, and I did not feel like that at all. However, my parents, having met John, also must have agreed with him, so they explained to me what was important. Many people read 1 Corinthians 13 out of sentimentality, but there are very important guidelines in this chapter. Not once does it mention that love is sexual compatability or emotional satisfaction, as the world seems to think is important. It is a perfect picture of Father God's relationship with Jesus and Jesus' relationship with the church; how Jesus also demonstrates a reciprocal relationship with His Father, so that we, the church, and individuals in the church can respond in the right way. The relationship is always GIVING to the other party, not looking for what I can get out of the other. In Ephesians 5:22ff the husbands are commanded to follow this pattern and the wives to respond. When I realised that John believed these qualities, and desired to practise them, I realised that God was offering me a special treasure, so I decided to revise my life plans. I could not respond any other way, when God offered such a good plan, than to take this step of faith, even though I had my life worked out differently. For at least the second time in my life, my own life and career plan had been

overruled by an alternative offering from God. He respects our freewill, but He steps in with another open door, and is effectively saying "would you like to try my way?" Jesus does say in the Bible "he who has ears to hear, let him hear". When Jesus, by His Spirit, is in our hearts we have an inner "witness" which is the best way to go! (Jeremiah 29:11-14) Over these 40 years we have been married I have recognised more and more how good God was, and is, to me, because of this. Over those same 40 years, when it has become more and more difficult to find and keep a stable marriage, even in Christian circles, in our society, and when people have tried every other basis except God's clearly revealed principles, I am more sure than ever that God showed me that only "faith, hope and love" marriages actually work in the long term. This "giving to the loved one" attitude works in every area of the marriage, financial, relational and physical, through trials and successes. I know that these days young people have different ideas, but God made us, so He knows best how we are designed to function. I really believe it is best to follow the Maker's manual. He is committed to us so we need to be committed to Him, then to each other in marriage. I believe it is very important to confess this publicly, not just decide in our hearts and set up house.

It also makes me sad to see that some young men persuade young women (and sometimes the reverse) that having sex is the way to show love even before there is any promise of commitment or even when there is no intention whatever to commitment. This is a total recipe for disaster and long-term grief and problems. The relationship



might go OK for a while, but the foundation is totally faulty, and sooner or later cracks will come. If this sort of relationship has already been entered into, the ONLY way it can be saved is by the Blood of Jesus, by confession and repentance of sin, because Jesus paid the price, to redeem us from the curse of our disobedience. God is such a forgiver!

I am so blessed because our marriage had Jesus and His principles as a base.

If you, dear reader, are one of those who began wrongly, and have not come to Jesus and confessed your mistake and received His forgiveness and healing, do it now as 1 John 1:9 says to. He is faithful and just and will forgive your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Well, as I have previously written, I was incredibly blessed by God and we married and became a Christian partnership – (Ecclesiastes 4:12). It is good that two walk together... a threefold cord is not easily broken. I now had John's strengths to hold me up and he had mine to encourage him, and God Himself bound it all together and covered us with His love and blessing.

I could not imagine how it would work any other way. I was only 23 years old and just starting my "adult" life, yet my secret life was already that heaven would be better than life on earth, and Satan knew about it because I had said so, aloud, many times, but I did not know that this would tempt him to kill me or destroy me. I had not learned that death and life are in the power of the tongue quite literally (Proverbs 18:21) and that negative confessions give Satan opportunities

that he likes to take because he is, according to Jesus, a liar and murderer.

But God knew my weakness and in His mercy had already made provision for me in the husband He chose for me – a man so prayerful and patient, who really wanted to love like Jesus does.

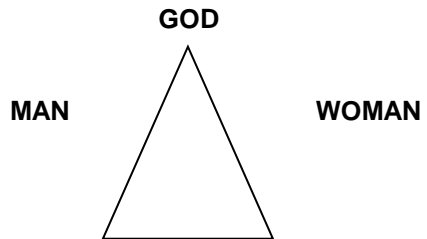
## CHAPTER 6 – Early Marriage Days

Isn't faith and vision wonderful! But there are many painful adjustments to achieving the goal.

In my experience God is so good. In these adjustment and learning situations He puts a "hedge" around us at first – everything is so wonderful! Then the hedge comes down a little at a time as we learn about the shock! horror! weaknesses of our partner. There are little clashes which are usually glossed over, but hopefully ironed out or resolved in bed, where everything is still fantastic. It took me quite a while to adjust to jazz music which John loved, but I did not understand. I was used to Bach's music, which John also liked a little. He was very good at giving way, so my choice reigned for a while, but eventually I came to appreciate his taste. Then there was the hidden handkerchieves in the wardrobe business. I really could not understand why he did not put them in the wash. I took offence because I thought it reflected on my ability or inability to be a good

housekeeper. It irritated me that he continued to do this. I think I needed reminding about 1 Corinthians 13, but he never did.

The Bible talks about God's love in us. We were constantly learning this truth by loving each other. This is made easier by the fact that we individually loved God first – we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19), and each of us desired to follow God's way. I saw a diagram once of a Christian marriage –



where one draws closer to the partner as one draws closer to God, if God is the primary focus. The opposite direction could also be true that if each partner pursues his or her own agenda, then eventually "offence" – a fence – may come between the partners of a marriage (or even a business arrangement, for that matter) until the distance is too great or the barrier too high for reconciliation.

I am so blessed that my marriage partner and I both understand this principle. God's love can surmount any hurdle and in Jesus Christ, who is the "gate" or "door" to any fence one can put up (Ephesians 2:14 & John 10:9), any relationship that is going the wrong direction can be healed.

We had joined a local church and the outside interests we had in common were focussed there, especially the choir and the youth group.

We loved serving the Lord and we were zealous, and as confident as young people in their 20s usually are. But we were totally naïve in regard to Satan's attacks. The church did not teach about persecutions or even about God's disciplining (Hebrews 12:5-13). We had no idea that persecution can come from inside the church if jealousy or self-righteousness or any other worldly passion creeps in and is unchecked. After we had been there about 20 months and a certain untrue accusation was directed at us, we decided that it would be best to leave this church. Our first baby had just been born and although we had friends there we also had a new home just far enough away for it to be a good idea to join a new church. Unfortunately, I already had an "offence" problem, so not dealing with this matter properly, but burying it in my subconscious, was further danger for my spiritual growth, because Satan was able to use these failures in relationship with authority in the church to take my eye off what God says, and to justify myself – the only safe way for anyone is that Jesus has justified us, not by our excuses but by His shed blood. As I look back these 40 years, I can only wish I had known the full gospel, and not a half-baked truth/lie combination. One of my desires in writing my story is that people who read it will see not to make the same mistakes that I made, which did not destroy my Christian life only because God is truly good and faithful. He sees and ministers to the heart of the person who longs to be His "good" child, even if they are making so many mistakes. He constantly looks upon us, if we have expressed the desire to be in His family, as a favoured one, because of His promise to Jesus. I am sure many people have given

up in despair because they do not really know how good and faithful to His promises God the Father is, and if a person does not know this, it is too hard to keep going. I was already focussing on heaven, rather than living a victorious Christian life of joy and peace.

There was a book on that topic doing the rounds at that time and I remember that I tried to read it, but I know it did not touch my heart. As I look back, I think that my disappointment that Christianity did not work for me was a stumbling block or offence to my heart being able to receive the message. However, at this time I did not even know that I had built a fence, therefore I certainly did not know how to remove it, although I had read the words in John 10, where Jesus calls Himself the "door" to come in and go out to find pasture. Because God is good I was able to keep going, but the offence laid at the Cross (for Jesus had made provision to remove it 2000 years ago) would have set me free. It is really scary to think that so many sincere Christians do not know that to take offence is a sin (Matthew 18), and that all one needs to do is repent and believe the gospel to be free. The undealt with offences build and build, hurting the heart, even though life goes on in the natural realm just the same.

## CHAPTER 7 – Young children

God is amazing! I have heard it said that a blind man has a heightened sense of touch. In other words if a part of us is damaged

or impaired in some way, God gives another strength somewhere else. So, even if the heart (spirit) is damaged in a certain area, God, in His mercy, strengthens another area of faith life in the meantime.

We did not have any trouble having our children and each one was born beautiful, healthy and very much loved, and each one very different in their gifts and talents – our first son very clever, earnest and quite serious (as a child anyway – he has a great sense of humour now). He was happy to conform, and was easy to rear. Our second, a beautiful daughter, was very spirited and hard to train unless she decided for herself that she wanted to do something. Our second son was (and still is) laid back and easy-going but training him was difficult because he got into mischief easily.

Each one of them loved Jesus from an early age – indeed this was the main thing we asked of God – and they grew up in the church.

It was quite hard for a mother who had decided her children were to grow up in the church to actually have them there. It was a time when people believed children should be seen and not heard. Therefore the normal restlessness of a child sitting in church for one hour was not well tolerated. It took a lot of faith and perseverance to bring them through.

One thing that God taught me very early was that He loves to hear the prayers of His children (big and small) and when any little sickness overtook my children, I saw Jesus heal them, sometimes instantly, every time. The church I attended at that time taught that God had 3 answers to prayer – yes, no and wait, but I saw that Jesus

looked with compassion on all who came to Him and He dealt with their problems with a "yes" every time. The Bible also told (still tells) me that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever, and I believe it. I began an experimental study where not only my own children, but any who were put in my care for even the shortest time – Sunday school class, school Scripture class, or whatever, if they wanted to believe what I taught from God's word, were also healed. This gave me a reason to keep going, even though there was still the inner turmoil of accumulated offence. What I experienced when I applied or chose to believe, was God's unfailing goodness and faithfulness to His promises. Searching the Scriptures for these promises was a wonderful adventure, and imparting them to children who have no "programmed" offence to God was a great pleasure. God really seemed to enjoy teaching me how to claim His promises and we played the most marvellous games so that He could demonstrate His ways and His power. He particularly helped me be creative, and stir others, especially my own children, to be creative and imaginative, and each of my own children are still brilliantly creative and imaginative, especially with their own children. My sons also love Christian ministry with all children because of this strength.

Matthew 18:1-5 is a very encouraging few words about children, how Jesus loves them so much, and is also very encouraging to keep a child-like quality all one's life – simply trusting and believing that God can and actively wants to fix up problems, kiss us better and train us in His ways for our good.

Hebrews 12:5ff is also very helpful and insightful for training one's children and also learning through this how the Heavenly Father trains His children all through their lives. In the "natural" realm, bad things happen, or we make mistakes frequently. I learnt through training my children how best to deal with these problems. Unfortunately I did not realise at the time that this should be a reflection of the supernatural relationship. I think if I had done so I would have broken down my own "fences". So many years later I realise that "sorry, Daddy", and the assurance "you're forgiven" is the end of any mistake and gives a fresh start. We repent, decide to go in God's way, and He empowers us to not fall into the same mistake again. This is the POWER of the gospel.

A child, when forgiven for a mistake, does not go on in guilt and shame unless a parent or other authority figure constantly throws the mistake back in the little one's face. This is where the gospel of forgiveness of sin is so important. I believe this is what Jesus means when He says not to cause a little one to stumble. It could cause a child to see God as unforgiving – a direct denial of the gospel. God has already forgiven all the sin in/of the world more than 2000 years ago when Jesus died on the Cross – the price is paid!

It seems that so many people are offended with God in these days. Did that offence begin with a false message which did not portray God's love and forgiveness? Did the "fence" grow bigger from continuing guilt and shame?

The message of the gospel is that Jesus died a terrible and unfair death so that the sin, guilt, shame and sickness is dealt with



once and for all time, and there is now love, acceptance, reconciliation, friendship, comfort, care, forgiveness, encouragement, healing and peace.

If we who are limited by human frailties, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the Heavenly Father who is pure goodness, give good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11).

## CHAPTER 8 – Relationships in church and with leadership

Strangely enough, people are embarrassed by adults who are child-like (not childish, which indicates negative, selfish, untrained attitudes), but trusting innocence and transparency.

We had started at a new local church after we had moved into our new home, a few weeks after our first son was born. The minister was very kind, hard-working and enthusiastic, and we, in our usual style, got involved in the life of the church quite quickly. There were some established families – leaders in the church who were about 10 to 15 years older than we were, but who accepted us and mentored us, but as I realise now, not so much to develop our uniqueness as to emulate them. We did not really see this at the time, because they were kind, good people, but underneath was the pressure to be like them, instead of developing who we are and what our calling in God

is. Perhaps this is where the "generation gap" develops. Younger people feel dictated to by older people and over a time resentment builds up, which simmers into offence and/or rebellion.

We attended church every week with our baby son, because that is, we believe, a part of being involved in the life of the church. In those days people seemed to think that children should not make any noise in church, but babies do not know the rules. It made it very hard, having made a decision to attend church as a family, to be required to make sure one's child did not make any noise during the service, and to have the intestinal fortitude to outstare those who scowled when the child did cry or make a noise. It was one thing with 1 child, but we soon had 3, and I rapidly developed a crusading spirit to change people's attitude, since I strongly believed that church should be for children too. As soon as the children were old enough, I got involved in Junior Sunday School, the boys' club and the girls' club, but this did not solve the children in church problem. Creches were tried, but older children got bored, waiting around. My heart's desire was that my own children would love Jesus and love His church, but it was very hard. Almost nobody seemed interested in the problem.

Over the years in this church (we stayed more than 20 years) two of my children gradually lost interest, to my great grief. I did not blame them at all, and actually took the youngest to another local church's youth group. But my precious daughter moved away from the church after trying some other local churches of her own choice. They were all the same, it seemed.

I also began teaching Scripture in the local schools, as my children were old enough. This involved doing a teaching course, part of which was a thesis on "Children can worship at home and church". I read the book which was lent to me for this purpose, and did the thesis .... the most radical, marvellous and exciting book on the subject which had been my own private crusade for years. I tried to buy a copy but it was out of print. However it reinforced my thinking on this subject and encouraged me greatly that I was on the right track. I began experimenting with the ideas suggested in the book, but I soon ran into trouble. In chapter 2, I mentioned my problem with authority in the church. Though this situation was so many years later, I had not yet repented for this incident, so I ran into real conflict with the authority in the church, who did not understand or like my experiments at all.

It was also about this time that we were invited to go to a Holy Spirit meeting with a group of leaders from the church. We both absolutely loved it, and started attending every meeting of Anglican Renewal Fellowship that we could (nearly every week). There was a freshness in every meeting that we had never experienced before. For the first time, I did not have to conform, and the meetings were quite noisy in a joyous way, especially if we prayed in tongues. Children were happy and comfortable in these meetings too.

Not long after this we left that church, and went, at another minister's invitation, to a cross-cultural ministry where we stayed 6 years. Those 6 years were very interesting, and we learnt a lot about

other cultures, and the relevance of the gospel in communication with these people who had come to make Australia their home.

During that time I also experimented with children's ministry – in Sunday school, Scripture in the local Primary schools, and friendship clubs after school hours but held at the school. Although we were unpaid workers, we were expected to be as full-time as we could. My husband was still in full-time employment, but we enjoyed the challenge.

But again something went wrong at the end of those 6 years. Offence was never very far beneath the surface, and we moved on to another church. I have learned that this must be Satan's favourite way of getting people out of a church. However, we were church attenders by conviction and by habit, so we found another church, where the minister had been willing to perform the marriage ceremony for my daughter who had given up on going to church, but really wanted God's blessing on her marriage. We wanted to bless this minister so we joined his church.

This minister was also a "charismatic", as it was then called, if one wanted to move in the power of the Holy Spirit. We felt we could learn more about what we had become very interested in. It was under this man's ministry that I first identified what was really the root cause of my problem with authority so long ago, so that I could confess my sin specifically and be forgiven and cleansed from unrighteousness.

Unfortunately I had a long practised habit of self-righteousness, self-justification and hidden pride, and judgementalism – I was critical

of other people and I knew I needed help from God. This was mostly hidden, but I knew my own hypocrisy well enough.

Then this kind and good man left the church very suddenly and nearly all the "charismatics" left as well. I remember I was very curious as to why they had all gone, but we stayed, because we had only been there just under 4 years. Because I had repented, I never had any conflict with either the pastor whose ministry had led me to understanding or the locum that followed him, but after another year a new minister came, and before long I was in conflict again. This was very discouraging because I considered my cause was just.

At the beginning of that year we had gone to a Benny Hinn Crusade in Brisbane. A friend had organised a group to travel by bus, and on the way we were asked to share what we were hoping God would do for us, and I said I was expecting the "Baptism of Fire", as mentioned in Matthew 3:11. I clearly remember every one laughing, but I had no idea even what the term meant, but God knew what I needed. We had an absolutely wonderful time and I thought the Baptism of Fire was wonderful too – well, yes! – but I did not know what was about to happen in the next 5 years. If I had, I think I would have backed off, but I will certainly never be able to say that God does not answer prayer. Although this is also about relationships in the church, I will keep it for a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER 9 – Hatred of Living, Self-curses and the Power of the Tongue

Though, in the last chapter, I moved through many years of our church life, there was a continuing refrain coming from my mouth. I hated myself and I hated living. There would be good days when things were OK, but I was always looking forward to the end. This was not a positive view of going to heaven after serving God the full number of my days. This was not a consciousness of the presence of the Lord in me to witness to the world and to fulfil my destiny. This was really a thinly disguised spirit of suicide. It was not worth spending money on nice clothes, or doing nice things. My only worth in being alive was "working for God". I might have been dead to sin, because of what Jesus had done for me, but I certainly knew nothing about being "alive to righteousness" (Romans 6:11-18).

How could such a situation have developed? I loved God but hated myself, even though He had made me in His image. Could I have done something to His creation that had spoiled His perfect plan? The trouble with performance-orientation (the Bible calls it man-pleasing) is that enough is never enough. It is not a sexual lust, but it is a lust just the same – approval, recognition, fame, attention. It is also manipulation, false expectation and deception. This sort of "love" (which is disguised lust) will never be satisfied (James 1: 14, 15).

It is helpful at this point to say that Jesus describes the "signature of the evil one" – (John 10:1-8) – "the thief comes to kill, steal and destroy". I had never been taught this.

The devil does not like people becoming Christians. He will try anything and everything to spoil our lives, to rob our joy, and distort our relationship with God, with all sorts of lies. He attacks our minds with ugly thoughts, and if he can get us to repeat them out loud, if we are stupid or ignorant enough of his strategies to believe him and agree with him, (totally contrary to what God thinks of us and says about us in His word), it gives the devil legal right to hold us to our foolish words. Every time I said out loud that I hated living, it gave the devil the right to try to kill me, but I was ignorant of what I was doing with my own mouth. I was being seriously attacked by demons, and I was getting into an ever deepening mess – from shame and blame to sense of failure, to hatred of self, to spirits of death and suicide. Romans 7 explains the inner struggle.

All the while I kept on trying to live an outwardly Christian life, serving in the church and trying to be a "good" Christian, trying to love people while I had actually lost sight of God's love for me. In "doing" Christian stuff I had stopped going to the Source, who is LOVE, for a daily infilling – my "cup" was dry. I could no longer apply the promises of God to my own life, although I knew them very well, but I could try to assure others and encourage them about God's love – perhaps this was the ultimate hypocrisy!

Because from ballet days my emotions were unstable, I did have "highs" where I was OK, but I also had "lows", when I was particularly susceptible to the bad thoughts and wallowed in them, like a pig in mud.

It is a miracle of God's grace in my life that His purposes are never thwarted. He knew my heart and spirit. It was towards Him and belonged to Him, but I had allowed my soul (my mind, will and especially my emotions) to rule too often in my life. In this, I did recognise my own instability in my emotional life, because I had recognised that I was not suited to life in the theatrical world a long time before, but I had no idea how I could change.

It is really terrible to realise that by believing Satan's lies, I was doing exactly what Eve did in Genesis 3:1-5. In believing Satan, I was becoming deaf to God's gentle, soft voice, and actually, therefore, not following God at all. The Bible says the heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9,10). If I say I believe it and do not practise it, I do not really believe it at all.

But God's Spirit planted within us because of a commitment made to him, even a long time ago, is as God is – full of love (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7), and Jesus Himself intercedes for us before the throne of God (Hebrews 7:29). No one is too far from such a loving God. I heard it said once, that when we have made a commitment to God, it is as if He has placed an elastic band around us and Him, to hold us to Himself. We might be wayward and stretch it, but the further we do, the stronger it will bounce back to Him. I find that quite a good analogy.

I had sown a lot of bad "seed" with my mouth, by my destructive words that were about to bear bad fruit....



## CHAPTER 10 – Cancer; body and spirit; Bleeding to death and Healing

So why does God always want us to think, speak and act purely?

(Philippians 4:8 & James 3:17,18)

This is really a matter of life and death (Deuteronomy 30:14-16, 19,20). It was from the beginning and it is an eternal principle of God which we break to our own cost. Jesus died to give us LIFE but we need to follow the Maker's instructions.

I have a very nice washing machine. It washes my clothes very well, but if I were to put my dishes in it, I would have damaged dishes and damaged washing machine. Only fools would disobey the manufacturer's instructions.

I was 32 years old and the children were very young when I got cancer. The symptoms were very obvious, I went to the doctor and he told me I would have to have an operation immediately. I was not at all worried; good reaction, but for the wrong reason; I might die. Was God about to answer my spoken wishes? People thought I was so brave but I had hidden thoughts! However, I did not die. I received a lot of attention, prayers, cards and gifts. I absolutely LOVED the attention.

Two weeks later, it looked as if I were dying. My whole gastrointestinal tract had closed down and I was absorbing no nutrition at all, even though I was on a "drip". Another operation followed – my body and spirit were fighting my stupid mental attitude (Proverbs 18:14a). That operation was also a success, then I got blood poisoning from

having the drip so long. The antibiotics worked fine on the infection, but my mind, will and emotions were being challenged by my body and spirit, which had been dedicated to God.

After 7 weeks I came out of hospital, and after 3 months I was as good as new.

Why had God healed me? Ten of my friends died of cancer, so why? God's mercy is very great, and His plans come to pass (Proverbs 8:35 & Proverbs 19:21). He is loving and compassionate to those who make stupid mistakes because of ignorance, and makes a way for us to repent.

I believe it was offence and grudge-bearing (unforgiveness), a trait that runs in my family from many generations ago, that caused my cancer (I do not say that all cancer is because of this). During my recovery I did say sorry to God for this and asked Him to forgive me. He is a merciful God!

But did I change? At first I did, but as the years went by, when anything went wrong, the habit of my speech tempted me again to say unwise words, such as "I wish I were dead". There was still a tendency to offence. I discovered that although I said I had forgiven people, I continued to remember what they had done, and these thoughts kept me in bondage.

It was during a seemingly successful ministry time, with offences coming thick and fast that disaster struck again.

I had what was supposed to be a fairly routine operation, but I was not happy about it or the doctor who was doing it. I wanted to back out of it at the last minute, only agreeing to it under pressure.

The doctor completely messed up the operation and went away, leaving the nursing staff to attend to everything. Unfortunately, I was bleeding to death internally, had to be put on life support machines, and the nurses had to call in a surgeon of their choice (a most beautiful and competent doctor) to sort out all the mess and save my life.

Well obviously I survived, but even during that time the original doctor had the gall to blame me for his stuff-up. There is a Proverb (26:2) that tells us not to receive that sort of rubbish, but I was still prone to offence, so my soul was affected by it. However the good doctor was able to encourage me, so I recovered fully in health and strength quite quickly. Again God had saved me from death. This time I began to catch on that God wanted me to live, for His own purposes. But what were they?

Apart from these two incidents, and an occasional slight sniffle of a common cold, I am never sick. The one thing about Jesus that I have never doubted is that He saves and heals, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). I now understand, because I have been taught, and then read for myself, that we can choose to walk in the "healing covenant" that God revealed to Moses (Exodus 15:26) when He said "I am Jehovah, the healer". One way we share in Jesus' sufferings, as mentioned in Romans 8:16, is to RESIST the devil and all His works. If Jesus has paid the price, we are to honour Him by believing Him and obeying. James (4:7) says to submit to God and resist the devil and he will flee from you. We actually have a responsibility to resist all sickness as well as all sin – not to believe the devil's whisperings,

little symptoms etc., but to believe God – not to be double-minded, so I refuse to be sick, even though it might be a temptation to get a day off work, or sympathy from friends.

This belief does not come in a day, but by holding to it over a period of time by faith, until it comes to pass in one's life. If an illness or condition has become established in one's life because of ignorance or acceptance of a "curse", sometimes it takes a miracle from God to remove it. Well-meaning people, who do not understand the healing promises of God, even doctors or other authority figures, diagnose symptoms as if they have an inevitable outcome. If we accept it, when it is, in fact, an attack of the evil one, who only comes to kill, steal and destroy, and we do not immediately choose to believe God's opinion of the matter, Satan also immediately takes advantage of our ignorance, and we receive the "curse".

I believe it is a good thing to confess, all the time, that I am healthy. God has honoured my confession and my faith for the last 15 years, when I have had no health problems at all – although I have had plenty of attacks!

Some people believe God "lets" us get sick to teach us something, or even sends sickness, but this is obviously not true. Jesus said "if you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9,10). The Bible says that Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with Him (Acts 10:38). Therefore God cannot send sickness or affliction on a person, or He would be a liar.

But God gave us free-will. He must be very shocked and grieved to see His children accepting the devil's poisonous plans, just because they are ignorant of His goodness.

I consider that the healing ministry is, in very large part, to encourage God's own people to believe His goodness, protection and love. I love to pray for people and God answers my prayers, but if a person will not receive God's healing into their minds and bodies, God does not override our free-will, but respects it completely.

If, however, we have formed bad habits, such as I did in wishing for death, it does take time, and God really understands our weaknesses.

We do need to repent of wrong attitudes and ask God to help and strengthen us.

This desire to be involved in, and see people receive healings and miracles from God, has been a desire of my heart ever since God healed my own children so readily, even when the church leaders told me it had ceased. But there are definite requirements from God as to who is suitable to minister in this capacity. Just believing is not enough. Understanding the anointing that removes burdens and breaks yokes (Isaiah 10:27 & 1 John 2:20,27) is very important. Being filled with the Holy Spirit also, and at this point I did not know my authority in God at all. Offence in my life had seriously impaired the flow of God's anointing to others.

Someone said you cannot give away what you do not have. The story of the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-16) is a very interesting illustration.

But God honours the desires of one's heart. They are planted there by Him. We just need to submit to His training (Hebrews 12:7-13).

## CHAPTER 11 – Is this success? Evangelism, Ministry with children, & new Chinese friends

Life was really interesting at the cross-cultural church. We felt needed, and as "lay" workers, we were encouraged to do just about everything except preach.

I taught Sunday school, school Scripture on 3 mornings a week, kids' club after school. We had "open" church for passers-by to come in for prayer. We went to Bible studies and prayer meetings, we did house-to-house visiting and evangelism, and although the church was a half hour drive from our home, we were doing 8 – 10 drives there and back every week. In other words we were very busy.

I was able to put a lot of the experiments I had read in the book into practice and I was having a very successful children's ministry. I encouraged the children to pray for each other and many were healed graciously and mercifully by the Lord.

It was at this church that I made a new friend who was nearly 30 years older than me but a woman after my own heart. I really loved and admired her. She was definitely non-conformist, but she

demonstrated to me the necessity to fit in, in certain circumstances. I had not previously had anyone to guide me in this way. We became prayer partners and it was with her that I had my first experience of laying hands on someone (other than my own children or children in my classes) and seeing them powerfully and instantly healed – one minute not being able to move from arthritis pain, and the next totally pain-free. The experience was a "high" that I have never come down from – do it again, Lord!!

It was also at this church that we became friends with many Chinese young people who had come to Australia about the time of the Tiananmen massacre and wanted to stay here. Although they could not speak English well, they liked having Australian friends. They came to church and Bible studies, and most became Christians.

During "open" church times we encouraged and prayed with many people, including a girl who said she had a demon (she was delivered), and a girl who was about to become a priestess in a satanic "church" (we never saw her again).

At the church were people from about 20 other different countries as well. We shared together all the strengths of our respective cultures, and let the weaknesses drop away. It seemed to be the ideal (God's?) way of us fellowshiping together.

Doing things that were successful, encouraging other people, being used by God to bring healing. These things look very good on a resume. But what about my own life? I headed this chapter "Is this success"? The Westminster Confession of Faith says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever. Was I

glorifying God or was I glorifying myself? Was I enjoying Him for who He is, or was I enjoying working for Him, as opposed to working with Him? There is a difference!

It is quite obvious in the Scriptures that God is most interested in our character. The world gains significance from achievements in work, sport, etc. but this is not so with God. He gives His favour, approval and anointing to those who come into His presence (through the Blood of Jesus), and spend time with Him, to receive an abundance of His love (until our "cup" overflows). He makes it plain that no matter what gift we have, no matter what we do, it is worthless without love (1 Corinthians 13). He IS love, so we have to come to Him to receive the infilling, but I still did not know this, and actually I was still not being taught. One day I did say to this minister that I wished I were dead. To my shock he said "you are supposed to be dead". (He meant to be dead to self – but it shocked and offended me greatly and he did not explain at the time). So what was this secret that I did not know, but needed to know?

Not long after this, I did something wrong. I felt very indignant about someone who had just become a Christian not being allowed to receive the Holy Communion elements until they had been baptised. Apparently it was the minister's requirement, but I did not know, and certainly did not agree. I decided to make a stand about it (against him, unwittingly) and, to my horror, someone else sided with me publicly. I knew this was wrong and that I had, without thinking out the consequences of my actions, started a faction (expressedly forbidden in Galatians 5:20), and I was called to give account. It was



an absolutely terrible interview, because my apology was not accepted without the other person having their say about my character etc. for about one hour. I was really shattered, both during and afterwards, and the minister obviously thought he was doing me a favour. But God is good. He reminded me of Isaiah 42:3, and then I sensed Him say, when I felt so unjustly treated, "have you ever treated anyone unjustly? Now you know what it felt like when Jesus was treated so unjustly, and you did not have to shed your blood" (Hebrews 12:4-6).

I was just beginning to learn what God's idea of success is and what my perspective had been. Jesus Himself said to His disciples not to rejoice...(at powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit's work)...but to rejoice that your names are written in heaven (the Lamb's book of life) (Luke 10:20).

We had human successes, but God had a better plan that He considered success – freedom from sin that so tightly clings (Hebrews 12:1).

## CHAPTER 12 – Baptism of Fire

We had by now left the church that trained us so well in cross-cultural ministry, and moved to the church where the minister had blessed us by being willing to conduct my daughter's wedding ceremony, as previously mentioned.

When I was convicted of the mistake that had affected my relationship with church leaders and other authority figures to a lesser extent, I really wanted to be a part of the prayer team in the church, but I was always blocked. I went to training classes, and did as many things as I could to earn favour in this church. But I was blinded to my own spiritual condition; works and human successes had by now caused me to be self-righteous and self-confident. There would be extreme danger for anyone I ministered to, in that I could confer these ungodly "gifts" to them, or I could steal God's glory for myself, and incur God's severe discipline (Isaiah 48:10,11). When I look back, I am not surprised at not being liked much, though some people tried to disguise it, and some were just straight out sweet people.

But actually "offence" gives offence. It is like a bad smell that hangs around, and people have to brace themselves to associate with you. People who really love, look through this veneer to the hurt heart underneath. I was so blessed that my husband always loved me unconditionally and did not judge me at all, always defending me when I was yet again "wronged". My motives towards helping people were good enough, and I did nice things for people, but the "aroma" was always there, giving out confusing messages.

I am not surprised that people do not want to go to church, or do not like the church. It is full of hurting people who know instinctively that Jesus is the answer, but do not meet Jesus (the only one who loves unconditionally) often enough in the people who are supposed to be His followers. They are then offended with the church itself and/or with its leaders. The trouble is though, that the church is really

a "hospital" for wounded hearts that have come to a Saviour. When people go to a real hospital they do not expect another patient to minister to their needs, but there is that expectation in the church. The truth is that the source of our help is in God alone (Psalm 121:1). He is the only one with the love, mercy and compassion, the wisdom and insights, and the ability to heal and change lives. Until we are transformed enough to believe this truth absolutely, until we resolutely decide that God's word is our only and absolute authority, and that anyone or anything that contradicts this is representing the evil one's opinion, we will always be prone to offence.

God seems to be a subscriber to the school of hard knocks for stubborn blockheads like I had become. But He is very subtle about it. He waits until we are desperate enough to ask Him in a way that He can answer our prayer, His desire for our best, and perhaps to teach someone else a lesson as well. (ie, Habakkuk 1). I have discovered God never wastes golden opportunities for His children's ultimate good.

We had begun to watch Benny Hinn on TV and also Kenneth Copeland. This was teaching I had never heard before, but like the Holy Spirit Renewal, many years before, I embraced this teaching wholeheartedly. I knew it was the truth and I knew it was good for me. I can remember, when Benny Hinn put up his hands and said, "believe God for your healing", I knew that, although I was strong physically, I desperately needed emotional healing.

A man from our new church was organising a bus to the Benny Hinn crusade in Brisbane, so we decided to go. It was on this bus

that we were asked what we were expecting God to do for us. I said I wanted to know and experience what Matthew 4:11b meant – when John the Baptist says one who comes after himself will baptise with the Holy Spirit and FIRE. What is this baptism of fire? I had received the Holy Spirit, but I wanted to understand the baptism of fire. I can clearly remember laughter, not unkindly, but perhaps knowingly.

I had an absolutely wonderful time at the crusade, saw all the healing and miracles and felt really blessed. I thought the baptism of fire must be really good. I was about to find out – yes, it is really good AFTER it is over (Hebrews 12:7-13).

Not long after the crusade, the minister of this church asked me to leave his church. I cannot tell the details of this incident because, in this book, I am trying my best not to criticise any of the authority God has placed me under. I can only say that he made a choice that he saw best pastorally, but because of my proneness to offence, this was very hard for me, especially as he told my husband that he had better leave too.

I decided that I had had enough of the Anglican church to last my lifetime, and I would join another denomination – out of the frying pan and into the FIRE!! (But I did not suspect; it is only with hindsight that one can make those sort of puns). I did feel I had inherited self-righteousness and pride, judgementalism and a critical spirit, and I needed help.

About 12 months before, we had met the new pastor of a Pentecostal church nearby who had asked us to join his church. At

the time we had no idea that we would be looking for a new church in a short time, so we said no to him.

I remember I telephoned him and asked him if he still wanted old people in his church. I was 58, but the oldest by at least 10 years. He said yes, and told me the prayer meeting was on Friday and the time for church on Sunday, so I joined his church, and was baptised by immersion within two weeks.

The first 3 months was wonderful. My husband did not come to the new church straight away – he came about 6 weeks later than I did.

The people were friendly, the music and worship great and the pastor was a good preacher. I also joined a Bible study group and the prayer meetings were so stimulating and not boring!

Have you ever fallen asleep in front of a fire? At first it is so warm and cosy, but if you are too close, fire BURNS. God does warn US (Zechariah 13:9 & Malachi 3:3). After 3 months something terrible happened. The Bible study leader complained about me to the pastor of the church, and I was called to account. It seemed like a rerun of the former incident, only much worse. I was terrified. How could I prove my innocence? All I knew to do was to outlast my accuser and rely on God to justify me. But because at the last church I had been asked to leave, I started church cleaning and other works to "buy" my acceptance, and to try to prove I was a person of good character. This did not work! Then someone else complained about me – this obliged me to have "counselling". I was more terrified. I used to go to church each week and cry the whole service. Often I hid behind a

pillar so I could just worship God, whom I still loved and trusted in spite of what was happening. Sometimes I could not even last the service without fear overwhelming me, and I would go outside to the car.

I still went to the prayer meetings, put my tithe in the offering, attended the church meetings and the Bible study. The Bible study leader that got me into trouble in the first place had left soon after the incident. But the fear increased. I really wanted to be in the worship team and I tried to learn, but the fear was there all the time while I was at the church, although my "outside-the church" life went on perfectly normally. It was truly the weirdest time. The other strange thing was that God kept reminding me that I had asked about the baptism of fire, and I kept finding verses in the Bible to warn and encourage me, so we stayed on at this church, even when the pastor asked why hadn't we left. My husband always answered that God had not told us to go yet. By this time though I did not have one shred of confidence left. Actually the Bible does warn us to put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3), and God was stripping away all my "self-ness", but at the time it was all I could do just to hang in.

Then very suddenly the pastor left the church. Just before this he wanted me to come for counselling again. During this time he helped me identify one thing in my life that was giving a "false" reading of my character. I had transferred my ambition for my ballet career, which I had "sacrificed" to be a Christian, into a Christian career. I was exuding an aura of selfish ambition and vainglory (Philippians 2:3). I agreed with his diagnosis, and repented of this

attitude, believing God would cleanse me of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God is faithful – in the furnace of affliction dross is removed, although I still carried some.

Then a temporary pastor came. I was still terrified, but he inspired me to apply for the Bible College, which I did, and paid my fees, only to be told that they were sorry but, as the pastor would not recommend me I could not be accepted, and would I please go and collect my fee refund. This increased my terror. I had no comprehension of this at all, and I was shattered, hurt and offended. There was no one who could or would explain my unacceptability, and even God gave me no revelation on this matter, even to this day. It was something I was obliged to accept as a mystery of life.

There were other misunderstandings, apart from this one, so when the new "permanent" pastor was appointed I asked God for reassurance, whether I should stay on. During all this time (about 2 years), I no longer had any confidence in myself at all, but I had developed a lot more confidence in God's faithfulness to help me through such a difficult time, and He was faithful to enable me to keep going, although there was no explanation at all, and I really did not understand what God was doing in me. He has only given me revelation of this baptism of fire since He completed what He thought had to be done.

I did sense that God wanted me to stay on in this church, and I felt He said everything would work out OK. We thought the new pastor was a kind, friendly man, so we continued there in the Pentecostal church for another 3 years, but these were 3 more years

of trials and misunderstandings. I had so much garbage and dross that was weighing me down. God had not yet equipped me for what He really wanted me to do, the good works which He had prepared in advance for me to do (Ephesians 2:10). There was more training needed.

## CHAPTER 13 – Grace and love win

The new pastor constantly preached God's love and grace. He had had bad experiences in the church himself, but had had a revelation of these two topics which had changed his own life, and he felt challenged by God to teach it constantly. It was under his ministry that I first realised that, though I had been a Christian for nearly 50 years, I had only spent a few months in the "aura" or awareness of God's love and grace, and then "doing" things for God had caused me to move from grace to law (Galatians 5:4).

In the Old Testament, the Israelites had to obey God – keep the Law of Moses, but actually no one can do it, everyone falls short (Romans 3:10-20). All the law does is convict us of sin (Romans 3:20). This explained my sense of failure all the time; the fact that I just could not meet God's perfection, and began to hate myself. But this was not what conviction of sin is for – we are supposed to recognise the NEED of a Saviour. We are supposed to go to God for the answers – not work out answers for ourselves with our flawed human spirits.



Only the Holy Spirit knows the mind of the compassionate and loving Father, who did not send His only Son into the world to condemn us, but that we might be SAVED (John 3:17). Indeed, working out our own answers opens us up to the devil's whisperings – I had fallen, head (mind) first into the trap, and I never knew it. It is interesting to me that the Apostle Paul warns us to put on the helmet of salvation, because Satan always attacks our minds first (Ephesians 6:17).

The Bible also warns us that God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). My Christian life, instead of being a life of overflowing joy (John 15:11), was nearly destroyed, and I was not a good advertisement for a Christian because I was a failure. Who would want that?

I wish I could say that the revelation came and the transformation was instant, but it did not work like that.

At first the pastor preached this message and I moved into denial, because I was a CHRISTIAN, and did not need saving again. Then recognition of my need and self-pity took over, because of all the terrible things that people had said and done to me.

Self-pity (like all "self" things) is a valid reaction, but a bad choice. It is certain that if we pity ourselves no one else will, and will probably avoid associating with us as well. This pastor used to enjoy dramatising the "pity-pot"; the pouting lips and sulky or pathetic face that a child who is throwing a sit-down tantrum can do well, and then the normal parental reaction to such behaviour. Childish adults do it too, even if slightly more subtly, but others do not want to have

anything to do with it, so leave you alone. "Nobody cares about ME", the adult-child thinks.

When manipulative behaviour does not work, the natural mind thinks up a new scheme to get one's own way. I came to recognise that saying "I wish I was dead" was manipulative behaviour, not really a serious wish, as my spirit and body had proved during the health crises. Once I recognised the attitude behind my behaviour and was revolted by it, I repented and asked God to help me conquer it. At last I was hearing what the Maker's Manual has to say about "trouble-shooting".

Very soon after this, although this church has regular "altar" calls for a first-time commitment to following Jesus, the Holy Spirit led this pastor to ask those who needed to receive and embrace LIFE to acknowledge their need. God conveyed to me very strongly (into my mind) that this was for me. He was tired of my manipulative habit, and He wanted me to respond to the "altar" call. It was as hard for me, as for anyone who responds to God's call. You know you have to, there's something compelling you, but you feel so embarrassed and obvious. When I obeyed, I KNEW God was pleased. Somehow I felt joy rising up in my heart. The Bible says that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). This is not just a first-time coming to God, and it is not a formal repenting by rote, as some churches practise, but a serious turning away from sin, to a desire and adoption of God's right way of living. You just step out in faith, and God meets you, because He is the one that calls you. It does not matter what has gone before, whether you were/are a Christian or

not, moving forward to God physically, (as in "altar" calls), or just moving forward to God with your heart, it makes God happy. In fact, I believe God is thrilled that we lay down our own agenda and our baggage, and delighted to give us His righteousness by the divine exchange that He set up to save us (2 Corinthians 5:21) – our ashes for His beauty (Isaiah 61:3). Something incredibly miraculous happens – the greatest miracle of all, they call it.

The Bible calls it "newness of life", especially when we receive it the first time, or being "born again" (John 3:3-8). For people who come to God for the first time, it is like being fresh and new. I remembered what it had been like those first few months when I was conscious of the grace of God, so, so, long ago, but which I had lost so quickly, by trying to keep the law, the ten commandments and obligatory Bible reading, prayer, church-going, and the other things, which, in my inexperience, I had allowed to become "works". So many religions are caught up in this thinking too. Romans 10:4-13 also describes this imputed righteousness that comes to the believer, and the warning in Ephesians 2:9 – not by works so that no one can boast. Earning or working our way to eternal life is like trying to climb over the fences (like a thief), but Jesus is the gate (John 10:7-9) – for coming in and going out. I think thieves must actually live their lives in fear, because, unless one goes in openly (through the gate), one must always feel guilt and fear. There is also fear of death – the gate to eternity. Again Jesus is the gate, and His assurances to us in the Bible are better and safer than any system of weights and measures as to the "good" we have done.

It is also interesting that a watchman opens the gate for the shepherd to enter (John 10:3). The preacher is this watchman, whose words penetrate "the ear" to the spirit; hearing is a prerequisite to believing, and to calling on the Name of the Lord in order to be saved from our mistakes (Romans 10:13,14).

Stubborn and damaged hearts really need a heart "transplant". Offence and unforgiveness really put us in a prison, under a torturer (Matthew 18:34). I felt my heart had become damaged through offence, but Ezekiel 36:26 talks about the spiritual heart transplant. God's heart of righteousness is love, joy and peace (Romans 14:17b,18). Receiving my "heart transplant", even so many years after first committing my life to God, brought these things back to my life. I needed to know the truth (John 8:32) for freedom to live my life as God intended it to be.

There were still, however, remnants of fear in my life, but now I knew I had God's heart given to me, I had His favour. I had to actively choose to believe God over every thought (2 Corinthians 10:5). Jesus said the work of God is: to believe in the one He has sent (John 6:29). God's word versus anything or anyone else. This is why we read the Bible – not a religious requirement but so that we learn every one of His precious promises.

There was one more "test" to pass, before my Baptism of Fire was completed. I joined another Bible study group. Again, the leader was appointed by the pastor, but she did not like me as a person, or approve of my ways, and there were personality conflicts. She liked things just so (her way), and was a conformist herself, and obviously

considered this was the only way. My non-conformity seemed to make her angry. She wanted to control me, and seemed to think it was her right. Fear rose up in me again, and I learned that fear brings out all the predators, even in the church. Another lady, who was in charge of various "deacon" duties also frightened me and consequently preyed on me. It was important to reinforce in me that the only person whose opinion matters, is God. This was a hard lesson, because I had to decide God's grace and favour were everything, and the opinion of people who did not like me did not count at all. For a person for whom being liked had been so important that I tried to please everyone (and failed), except God (who, I thought I was pleasing, but I did not have to earn His favour at all), to find out that only God's opinion mattered, and that, according to His word, I am perfect in His sight. He is happy with the way He has made me, even if everyone else thinks I am weird, and I am holy and blameless in Jesus and His anointing, because of His righteousness imputed to me, because He died for me. He loves me, because He is love. All of this, when finally taken "on board" was a radical transformation for my mind, and I chose to believe it because God says it (Ephesians 1:4ff).

I think God was satisfied I at least had the theology straight, because He suddenly spoke to both my husband and me separately, at the very special occasion of the opening of a magnificent new auditorium, when the pastor was preaching on "taking a step of faith – into the unknown". God told us this was our last Sunday in this church. The following Tuesday we made a visit to the pastor (with a

cheque for our promised building-fund offering for the year – we did not want any loose ends) and told him we were going. His wife confirmed that God had told her we were going too, so we left.....but this time we had no plans and no ideas as to which church God would send us. However, we had learned so many hard but important lessons in the "school of hard knocks", and we had learned a lot about appropriate and Godly reactions to His disciplining. Perhaps now we were ready for an important assignment – the works that He had prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

## CHAPTER 14 – Freedom at last

I could not believe the feeling of freedom and joy when I left the last church. Although the pastor had been so good, those predators that had bothered me so much were "off my back", and I never had to see them again, unless I chose to visit that church for any reason. I was able to leave their disciplining, if God thought they needed it, to God Himself, because He is a just God, and we are blessed if we are persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10). They were answerable to God for their actions to me – "it is mine to avenge; I will repay" says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Their curses were on their own heads (Proverbs 26:2). I was not going to carry their sins on me (John 20:23) – the warning is plain; "whose sins you retain, they are retained". It

seemed I had at last learned not to carry unforgiveness. THAT was why Jesus kept telling us to forgive. It's GOOD!!

There was a small problem, of course. Am I on the scrap heap now? We have left the church "by faith", which we believed was God's leading, but my real "dream" was further away than ever – just momentary thoughts, but were they from the devil? Yes, of course because they were negative and destructive, but God is good!!

Within 48 hours of us telling the pastor we were leaving, God sent a FRIEND – a real friend, who had actually gone through many of the things we had. We had met him at the church we had just left, and been drawn to him, even just to welcome him and help him feel at home, and probably bought him a cup of coffee. The Bible talks about entertaining angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2). We did not realise at the time that he is an experienced evangelist – not famous in man's sight, but really famous in God's sight. We also did not know that he had a big dream too.

Well, this friend came to our home to talk – to ask us to join him, to be trained by him, particularly in street ministry. God had given him a new "strategy", and own his dream was to have a team of evangelists, especially to take a bus to country towns. I could hardly believe my ears – it must be God – so even though we had not found a church yet, we were certainly not on the scrap heap.

Now all we had to do was to find a church where I could dance for joy (Psalm 149:3,4).

When we were asked to leave the Anglican church, I thought I would never want to go back again, but the years in the Pentecostal

church had taught me a very interesting thing. The Anglican church, because of its Judeo-Christian perspective, is drawn to legalism, "correct" behaviour, and the letter of the law, but people usually have good manners, and the appearance and appreciation of "doing the right thing". Conformity tends to be its idol, but the atmosphere is "nice", as long as one does not rock the boat.

On the other hand, Pentecostal churches draw in real sinners – those who had messed up their lives, found Jesus, or rather, been found by Him, and had been turned around by the "power" of the gospel for transformation (eg, 1 Corinthians 2:4 & 1 Thessalonians 1:5). But this transformation is a process, and many are still struggling with lawlessness. One has the pride of life of law-fullness, and the other has the careless attitude of law-lessness. I loved the demonstration of the power of God to transform, but my patience was seriously tested by the happy-go-lucky attitudes, especially as I had been taught the former way as "right".

This picture of extremes really helped me to be open to where God wanted us to go. There was only one serious requirement – the church must want to operate in and by the Holy Spirit. A second requirement was that people would want to accept and love, not only us, but anyone who was "different". It would also be good if it were a multicultural church, because of our experience and interest in this.

For a couple of weeks we went to large and successful Pentecostal churches, which were very welcoming, with fantastic praise and worship, and marvellous preachers. They had so many impressive programs, the giving was extremely generous and the



expectations for salvations and signs and wonders was very high. We were, however, in spite of these attractions, drawn to a very special ministry – a reasonably local Anglican church, to which we had gone many years before, as visitors, because of that minister's interest in, and openness to the power of the Holy Spirit. It was very small, but people were friendly and welcoming, it was multicultural, set in one of the most multicultural areas in Sydney.

I was quite nervous at first because of my previous bad experiences, but God, because He is so good, showed me a beautiful picture in a vision – a very deep, although small, pool of water which was being kept fresh by an even deeper spring. The water was not overflowing the pool yet, so it was small, but God had plans to "push" more water into that pool from underneath, so that it would really overflow. It reminded me a little of Ezekiel 47.

Our cross-cultural dream – the gospel is for all nations (eg, Revelation 15:4) to fellowship together, to taste heaven on earth, is to relate to these cultures and peoples, no matter what their background, that have come to make Australia their home. We believe God has given us an affinity to these people, who are very "spiritual", but just don't know Jesus yet. We usually find them easy to relate to, and they like to be friends with us, especially Chinese people. We have always liked door-to-door, street witnessing and taking part in any outreach and evangelistic activities, but ultimately the church is the "fish" factory, the place where fishers of men bring the people Jesus has met and touched, so we wanted to be supported and encouraged by the church we attend.

Is there a perfect church? I have heard it said that it was, before "I" went there. It is true that we can attend a church with a fixed agenda, and when the church fails to meet it, we become offended.

If man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, and S-I-N is "I" between two poles, there is really no room for personal agendas and personal ego trips. Paul advises that, where possible, we are to live in peace with each other (1 Thessalonians 5:13), we are to be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (Philippians 2:2), so being free is being able to trust God enough, that when, or if, things go wrong, we do not choose to take offence, even if we are hurt, or we make mistakes ourselves. For the former we forgive (Matthew 6:14), and ask God for comfort (eg, Isaiah 33:2), and for the latter we say sorry (1 John 1:9).

It is wonderful to receive the Spirit of God into our lives without measure – to be open to whatever gift He bestows, without saying what we will or will not have, in total trust that every good gift comes from the Father (James 1:17), and that He only gives good gifts, because He is good.

Jesus said to His disciples that the Father would give another Counsellor to be with us forever – the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit is a wonderful guide and counsellor, always true, always loving, good, gentle. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and He strengthens us and encourages us when we are weak, either because we have succumbed to the evil one's temptings, or because someone has hurt us (Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 10:19-23, Romans 8:1,2). So I am free because God says so and I believe it (Romans 8:1,2).

Unfortunately, this "strengthening" nearly always involves further "opportunities" to take offence, so that we get used to resisting the devil in this matter. It is therefore inevitable that God will allow Satan certain "rein", even to the extent that He did for Job. This is not at all pleasant, but the "test" of being truly free is that we get better and better at refusing to take offence, no matter what.

At first I struggled and staggered, but God is so faithful to His commitment to us, if we want to be free, and He will so generously help. That promise (Philippians 4:6) is so helpful. I am at peace that God has made me a certain way, perhaps different to most people, and that not all people will like the "package". Some are willing to be Satan's tool to kill, steal and destroy (peace of mind, esteem, relationships etc.), but sometimes they are God's tools too – iron sharpens iron – sparks fly, but each person is supposed to grow in character, to become more Christlike. God has a marvellous way of bringing these sorts of encounters for the disciplining and development of both parties, as they refuse to be offended (Proverbs 27:17).

There are both these aspects in any church, however good (or bad). We are only vulnerable if we do not know God's ways. It is up to each one of us to pursue God and discover His ways for ourselves, in our personal relationship with Him.

## CHAPTER 15 – Where to now?

One's journey goes on! The best is yet to come!

God – the Alpha and Omega – the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8), who knew us before we were formed (Jeremiah 1:4), chose us in Him before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:29), with ever increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19), and we are to be confident that He, who began a good work in us will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

All this sounds like an impossible dream, except that God has said it and He NEVER lies. So how can all this come about?

I have always desired to serve God, since my teenage decision, and I have never changed my mind all those years. I am convinced, have always been convinced, that being a Christian is the only possible life – indeed, Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), but I seem to have messed up so badly. I do not see myself as I consider I should be, according to God's plan, even before I was born, and certainly the leaders in the church, who are offended at my "style", consider they have a duty to "improve" me, by reproofing me often, usually without explanation.

From the garden of Eden story, and Eve's fatal mistake, I can see that this is constantly the "human" condition – listening to the flesh (unsubmitted self, the reverse of God's way, ie, H(uman) SELF (FLESH)), and the devil (who, because of the original sin, has power in

this world – 1 John 5:19). Our responsibility is to listen to God, who is our Maker, Redeemer, and ever faithful Friend (2 Timothy 2:13).

It is easy to work out "good" things to do, but are they "God" things, or are they works of our own design and for our own ends? This is a constant challenge, because Jesus said "my sheep hear my voice, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). He does not expect us to do HIS work without guidance (Proverbs 3:3). "Let love and faithfulness never leave you" – who is Love, and who is the Faithful One? – "Bind these around your neck ." In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says "take My yoke upon you and learn from Me".

All the instructions are there for the best possible life, but for nearly 50 years I had not caught on to all these precious promises, and had actually gone my own way, in ignorance.

Jesus said "blessed are those who do not fall away (get offended) on account of Me" (Matthew 11:6). When people did, Jesus asked His disciples (John 6:66-68), but Peter had a revelation from the Holy Spirit, "Lord, to whom shall we go? – You have the words of eternal LIFE. The disciples still had Jesus' physical presence. Jesus did warn them (John 16:7) it is for our good that He went back to heaven – so that He would send the Counsellor – the Spirit of Truth – to guide us into all truth (John 16:13), bringing glory to Jesus, whom God has exalted above every other name (Philippians 2:9).

It seems that the ONLY way we can bring glory to Jesus is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is why I have come to believe that it is vital important in these days to be filled with, to continue being filled with, and fully surrendered to the Holy

Spirit. Zechariah (3:6) prophesied it – not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit. Jesus said to wait until the power from on high comes upon you (Acts 1:8). We are His disciples too, so His direction is for us. Everything has to be done by the Holy Spirit in order to bring glory to God.

There are plenty of books from recognised and renowned teachers on this subject, but, though we can read books for information, until we put the ideas into practice, obviously we cannot grasp how they work. There are people, to whom God has given favour, to bear witness, but one of the most interesting things I have noticed is that they are very "unusual" people, very committed to broadcasting what God has revealed to them, very courageous against opposition, very faith-filled, with a complete trust in God. These people really inspire me, that, even though they are mocked by "traditionalists", who prefer the "status quo", and reject new ideas (which I have come to believe are God's original ideas, rediscovered). Some of these Holy Spirit-filled people may present in unusual or even uncomfortable ways, but, as I have previously mentioned, God often offends the mind in order to reveal the heart.

It is my determined will to LOVE and emulate the people that God is obviously using with powerful manifestations of healings and drawing people to put their trust in God – whose actions fly in the face of the "rational", step out in faith into the "supernatural" realm – for without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). It seems that God is really pleased with willing "eccentricity" – off-centredness – perhaps the letter to the Laodiceans explains – "I wish you were hot

or cold, but you are luke-warm, and I loathe the taste." (Revelation 3:16, *my translation*). I believe luke-warm includes running with the crowd, and being a man-pleaser, when God desires us to stand strongly on His side, as a follower of Him, of His ways, being far superior to any human-devised ideas. I believe this is what God means when He says the first commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul (mind, will and emotions), mind (purpose) and strength (physical ability).

We are encouraged by the word of God – be never lacking in zeal (Romans 12:11) – at the same time we are warned that zeal must be based on the knowledge that our righteousness can never be established by our works (Romans 10:2) – any work for God is based on faith and obedience to God alone. The apostle Paul also writes to the Galatians (3:1-5) how foolish it is to begin in belief, by the Holy Spirit's revelation and then try human effort.

The balance between zeal and "rest" in God's working in and through us is difficult to establish. He says not to be lazy (eg, 1 Thessalonians 5:7), and not to run ahead (2 John verse 9). We are also warned against being timid or fearful (eg, 2 Timothy 1:7). It seems that most people tend towards being "under-achievers" in their Christian life, and need stirring up (Hebrews 10:25). This is much easier for the leaders. What leaders seem to find so difficult is the "over-achievers" who need quelling, because they have moved beyond the invisible tolerance "line", which every leader seems to need with their supporters. This is, of course a valid "line" for leaders to have. It is assumed that they know their congregation, and have every right to set the "line", but for

the zealous this line IS invisible, because "nothing is impossible with God" (Jeremiah 32:17, Luke 18:27 & Luke 1:37). They have already dreamed up what they want to do, and push through. Before they know it, they have "steamed" their ship onto the rocks. In my experience, the leader almost always POUNCES. Galatians 6:1-5 says that this correction should be done gently, but it rarely is. The sense of unreasonable "push", and infringement of the "line" seems to get their "dander" up, and they automatically assume the offender has done it deliberately – they make a judgement and get "stuck into" the offender's character, or any other tactic to frighten and intimidate. Of course, the normal reaction to such treatment is deep hurt and offence, when all the over-zealous one meant to do was to be helpful. Sensibly cautious people, at this point, back down, or out completely, if they have no "stomach" for it all. I believe, from door-to-door surveys I have conducted, that about 98% of people who will not "darken the doors" of the church have had this happen to them, since almost certainly most of these 98% are, by nature, non-conformists.

Of course it is difficult to be a leader, a forerunner, but sometimes it is just as hard to be a "supporter", because there has never been, in my experience, a theology or even a strategy taught, to use gifted people who are not called to be pastors or leaders in the church, but who desire to serve God "full-time", and in an unpaid capacity. Most leaders look on them as a threat. They might not say anything outwardly, but the impatient manner conveys the attitude well enough. I have found comfort, many times, in Ezekiel 34:2b-6. When no one else understood where I was coming from, the Lord, the good



Shepherd, always understood and had time for me. When the "wild animals", messengers who were serving Satan, either demonic or human, "sucked" me in, the Lord rescued me and encouraged me, even while He also disciplined me.

I can only testify that Ezekiel 34:11-16 is a true prophecy, and that turning to the Lord, who IS the shepherd, is the only answer, because He is faithful.

Ezekiel 34:17-24 is a warning to the "supporters" in the church. It warns us not to jostle one another for position, and seek out our own ends at someone else's expense, so that it turns a weaker person away from fellowship.

The promises of God to the leader and the supporters who are functioning in unity is also mentioned in this chapter of Ezekiel (34:25-31) – to live in safety. I have always longed for a church where I feel safe – where I can be who I am, a not yet "perfected" human being, who loves God with all my heart, and longs to serve Him to the best of my ability, and then some, according to His power in me, to share my strengths and be strengthened in my weaknesses, in love, so that I can be changed from one degree of glory to a higher in accordance with His promises and plans (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Ephesians 4:1-16 also talks about the ideal qualities of each Christian in the fellowship – the aim being to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:12); building one another up in love, for God is LOVE and He wants to dwell among us.

So where am I going? Where are we all going? We are all on a journey together – towards the fullness of Christ, remembering that

each one of us has faults and strengths, and we are in it together, preferably for the better, because we need each other, including you, dear reader.

I am confident that, because God said He has begun a good work in me (and each one of us), He will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

**COME LORD JESUS!**

