

Change takes Effort



Joanna Barratt

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by **Joanna Barratt**

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M14 5QH, UK.

barrattministries@gmail.com

www.barrattministries.org.uk

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Introduction

This book is certainly not about weight loss or body building, but observing the effort needed to change physically is a great example of what it takes to change spiritually. All we need to do is adjust our thinking.

Some years ago Izaak, my younger son, bought some weights for his older brother, Nathan, as a birthday gift. However, after a couple of exercise sessions with these weights Nathan was complaining to me how much his body ached and how sore he felt. But after a very short time indeed I noticed changes in his physique and mentioned it. He was really chuffed that it was noticeable and it was like a switch had been turned on in his brain. Instead of complaining he started welcoming the pain because he realised the tearing of his muscles and them healing again was actually making them bigger

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and stronger. And because he could see his body changing for himself that phrase we use so often, 'no pain, no gain', took on a whole new meaning! He even started finishing off his showers with cold water – in the middle of winter – to make his body work more efficiently. Well, from then onwards whenever things got tough we'd laughingly say to one another, "Embrace the suck!"

After Jesus was released into his ministry at thirty years of age he didn't walk this earth for three years showing us how to build up the body. No, he was demonstrating practically how we should build up and mature our spiritual man so that we could please and be of use to God.

It's truly amazing what our mind can do. Our attitude towards pain and discomfort is all dependent upon how we view them.

Chapter One

Emotional Decisions

And when the daughter of Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever you will, and I will give it you. And he swore unto her, Whatsoever you shall ask of me, I will give it you, unto the half of my kingdom.

And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that you give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which

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sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded John's head to be brought: and the executioner went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.

Mark 6:22-28

How disgusting is it that this man, Herod, should make a rash promise of such magnitude whilst being sexually aroused? He was the king of the Jews, the highest in authority, yet he madly promised to give up to half his kingdom to a young woman for no other reason than she'd danced in such a seductive, provocative manner that she'd set his lustful desires on fire. I wonder what he'd have done if she'd actually asked for half his kingdom? Where would that have left him?

The worst thing about this incident was that, because he'd opened his big mouth in front of all his guests he ended up murdering a man he greatly respected just to satisfy the request of his vindictive wife who used her daughter to seduce him. Herod had a great admiration for John. In the gospel of Mark we read this:

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and

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when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

Mark 6:20

It seems Herod actually took notice of John and his teaching, so much so that he altered some of his ways. This was the very reason the devil used his wife, Herodious, to get rid of him, and she got the better of him through emotional blackmail. He wouldn't have looked good in the eyes of his friends, and neither would the devil have been pleased, if Herod had been converted and begun to rule in a godly manner. I'll bet Herod wished he could have turned the clock back and never uttered those damnable words.

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King David was also guilty of doing something stupid when his emotions were aroused. He looked out of his window one evening and saw a woman bathing. She was the wife of one of his very well respected and loyal army officers who was at that very moment engaged in fighting a war. David already had eight wives, but the fact that he was watching something he shouldn't aroused his manly passions to such a height that he actually sent one of his servants to bring the woman to him, and his aroused

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passions couldn't be satisfied until he'd committing adultery with her. His immediate lustful emotions had been satisfied, but as with all our actions there were consequences.

A few weeks later the woman let him know she was pregnant. So, afraid for his reputation, he called her husband away from the battle and tried his best to get him to spend some personal time with his wife. But this honourable soldier in all conscience couldn't do this knowing his comrades were still fighting, risking their lives out there on the battlefield.

From Bad To Worse!

Realising he was going to be found out, David sent him back into the battle with a dispatch for his commanding officer instructing that the bearer of the message be placed in the thickest part of the action with the intent that he should die in battle. And his order was obeyed!

David wasn't an evil man like Herod, but he made an emotional decision based on lust which caused him to commit adultery. Then he made another decision based on fear of being found out which ended up with him committing murder.

Leaders, in particular, should be men of principle. Principle and discipline should go hand in hand. A

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good leader should never make emotional decisions. He should rule with his head, not with his feelings. An emotional decision is always based on how we're feeling at the time. This is so very dangerous as feelings are momentary, but the consequences of decisions made under pressure can last a lifetime.

My pastor used to say, "There's no such thing as a small decision because everyone decision you make lasts the rest of your life." He also said "Never make decisions under pressure." But the problem with humanity is that many of us make emotional decisions.

Fights start because words have been spoken, tempers have flared, then the fists start flying. When I used to visit the prisons I found that many people were there for manslaughter. Manslaughter was different to murder because the victim's deaths hadn't been premeditated. They were accidental in the sense that someone had lost their temper, done something stupid in the heat of the moment, and it resulted in them killing the one they were angry with.

Girls get pregnant because of emotional decisions. Sometimes the girl doesn't even know the name of the guy! They've just been to a party, got drunk, and the next thing they know is that they wake up in bed with a complete stranger.

The vast majority of abortions are performed because someone made an emotional decision. The

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mother or father think a baby is too big a responsibility to handle so they get rid of the potential problem.

Marriages often end in divorce because of emotional decisions. People have walked out of jobs because they got emotionally upset about something not going their way.

Consequences

Dogs have been kicked; crockery, computers, and furniture have been smashed; promises have been broken; lies have been told; and a million and one other things done, just because decisions were made when feeling emotional. And with all these things they immediately, or eventually, reap the consequences of their actions.

What's the matter with us? Why do we act like this?

Well, we're not robots – we're human beings, subject to passions and emotions, and need a relationship with God because the truth of it is we're all spirits which have been clothed with human bodies. Surgeons can't cut us open to find love, hate, passion, or anger, yet that's exactly how we function, and it's how our bodies interpret whether we're sick or well.

God (and I'm talking about the creator of heaven and earth, the one who created Adam and

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Eve the first two people to ever live), well this God created us with the need to have a relationship with him. If we don't have that relationship then nothing is properly in synch in our lives. We feel anxious, fearful, stressed, pressured, angry, and have no inner peace. We never can have peace because our sin has cut us off from God. God is the ultimate judge and is absolutely just. He rewards obedience, but he's certainly no pushover because he also punishes disobedience.

We've All Messed Up

Every single person who's ever lived has sinned and been disobedient to God, we've all made stupid, messed up decisions and been cut off from God. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death (that means spiritual death as well as physical death) but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. The Bible also states that without the shedding of blood there's no way sin can be forgiven, that's why the Israelites offered animals as sacrifices to God, it was so their sins could be forgiven. And they did this over and over again because they couldn't help sinning and making a mess of their lives.

Jesus Christ (who's just a cuss word to many people) was a man who loved God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and actually lived

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a perfect, obedient, sinless life. He offered himself as a sacrifice to God so that he could be sentenced to death, thus paying the price for the sin of all mankind. God accepted his sacrifice, that's why the Bible says that the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If God has opened your spiritual eyes to this truth and you can believe it, then ask Jesus Christ to forgive you for all the sinful and disobedient things you've ever done in your life, and ask him to include you in the sacrifice he made for sin 2000 years ago, you too can be forgiven and begin to have a spiritual relationship with Almighty God. You can't fool God. If you ask in sincerity, and with deep regret that you've messed up your life, God will know, and you will definitely know that he's heard you.

None of us can do this life on our own – it's too hard. We need God to take charge of our lives and teach us his ways, no matter how young or old we are. This is one emotional decision every one of us needs to make.

Chapter Two

My Testimony

Is your life a **disaster** or could you possibly have a **destiny**? We've all got stories to tell. We've all experienced things which have left permanent scars. I grew up in a very rough, poor district of Manchester in England. My father had been a soldier in World War 2 and when the war was over decided to make the army his career. He married my Mum and she continued to live with her parents whilst Dad worked in the forces, only seeing him when he came home on leave. Whilst living with her parents Mum had two children but, deciding that she couldn't handle this situation any longer, wrote to Dad's superior officer telling him of her struggles saying that she needed her husband at home. So, against his will, Dad was discharged from the army.

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Obviously he begrudged both Mum and the two children who'd placed him in this position. When I came on the scene he decided he quite liked kids after all and doted on me. I became Dad's pet. He let me say and do anything I wanted which caused my mother and older siblings to resent me making me cling to Dad all the more. But then six years later Mum had another baby and Dad's attention was diverted. It didn't take him long to realise what a self-willed, obnoxious, spoilt little brat I'd become, and decided he didn't like me either.

Both Parents Were Boxers

Whilst in the army my Dad excelled at sport and became a champion boxer. To my surprise I found out many years later, when my Mum was in her 80's, that she and her two older brothers had been exploited by my grandfather to become bare-knuckle street fighters who fought for bets. So you can imagine the atmosphere I grew up in. If there was a disagreement in the home no one would sit down and talk about the problem, we'd shout, scream, throw things, or throw punches, and we all knew how to fight.

Mum had been very sick since giving birth to me as there had been complications during my delivery. Because I had the umbilical cord

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wrapped around my neck I had to be cut me free, but unfortunately the doctor also cut my mother's womb which caused her serious internal problems. She had to endure three major operations to correct these problems but none were successful. Constant pain and bitterness are not ideal ingredients for a happy marriage, consequently Mum and Dad's marriage was very unstable and they were constantly threatening to divorce.

A Divine Appointment

When I was nine years old Dad took Mum out for a drive on his motorbike. They visited an old church where one of Dad's ancestors was buried. Inside the church there was a huge Bible on the lectern so both Mum and Dad decided to renew their marriage vows. When they came out of the church there was a man standing under a tree who asked them if they knew Jesus Christ. He told them God had always wanted a relationship with people but their sin and rebellion had made it impossible, and in reality everyone had ruined their future prospects because the penalty for sin is death, both physical and spiritual. But God has proved his desire for this relationship by sending his own son Jesus Christ to live a perfect, obedient life in this world for 30 years, setting us a tremendous example of how we can live

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to please God. But then evil men crucified him 2000 years ago, even though he was totally innocent. But God allowed this as in actual fact Jesus was paying the penalty for us all by sacrificing his own perfect life. He took away the sin of the whole world so we can have an unhindered relationship with God. If you can believe this in your heart then this is what the Bible states:

This is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (meaning physical death is not the end of your life). For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. The one who believes in Jesus is not condemned. The one who does not believe in Jesus and what he has done has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. Now this is why God will judge the world : the light has come into the world (Jesus Christ, who lived a life that truly pleased God and was a blinding light, an example for everyone), and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who

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does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, because they're afraid that their evil deeds will be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done because he wants a relationship with God.

John 3:16-21

Well, after a God inspired conversation, my Mum and Dad both ended up kneeling down on the gravestones outside the church asking Jesus to forgive their sins and evil deeds, and come into their hearts. The following Sunday the man they'd spoken with squeezed our whole family (six of us) into his little car driving us ten miles to his church. After listening to the sermon the pastor announced that if anyone needed to be healed physically, mentally, of spiritually, they should come forward for prayer. Mum certainly needed help in her condition so went forward and was prayed for. As soon as the pastor placed his hand on her forehead she said she felt a sensation like an electric current flow through her body which separated round the baby she was at that time carrying in her womb, which stopped at her pelvis. Then she said she experienced something like feathery fingertips on her pelvis and she was miraculously healed.

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Well, obviously, this changed things completely in our family. We now caught two buses in order to attend the church five times per week. As a family we learned hymns, scriptures, we could pray spontaneous prayers, and my Mum and Dad would share their new found faith with everyone they met. We lived in an avenue so everyone who knew Mum could see that she was healed and wanted what she had. We often took these people to church with us and they too would have an experience of God's love.

Fighting With Scriptures

Unfortunately, Mum and Dad still fought together like cat and dog, but now instead of swearing, they'd be quoting scriptures at one another. Dad would yell at Mum, "Obey your husband", but Mum would retort with, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church", and because Mum was rebellious and wanted to wear the trousers (even though she was a lot shorter than Dad), she'd goad him until they both started physically fighting. The neighbours would hear all the shouting and carrying on coming from our house, I'd run down the street to the public phone box to call for the police who would then come in their police cars to stop the fights, and sometimes would radio for an ambulance because Mum needed to be admitted to hospital.

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The neighbours witnessed all this so stopped going to the church.

I hated this lifestyle and was constantly running away from home and being brought back by the police. I hated the verbal abuse. I hated the violence. Yet, because I was brought up in this environment I grew up to be a really violent person myself.

So Much For Christianity!

When I was twelve years old I remember arguing with my younger sister. She wouldn't shut up. We initially fought verbally, but I got so frustrated I put my hands around her throat and started to squeeze. I didn't premeditate what I was doing, it was just a reaction. She went limp, her face changed colour, and I got so frightened that I just let go of her and ran up to my bedroom, panting. Thank God she recovered, but I knew then there was a monster in me that I absolutely hated, yet couldn't control.

A couple of years later as I was sitting at the kitchen table, my older brother was teasing and tormenting me. He wouldn't stop so I just picked up the nearest thing to hit him over the head. He put his hand up to ward off the blow and as I whacked him I realised I'd picked up the carving knife. Fortunately I only slashed his arm but I

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could have actually killed him if I'd hit his head. Mum applied a tourniquet straight away and he was rushed to hospital to patch up the damage, but this again frightened me because I couldn't control my violent anger and aggression, and was truly scared of where it would lead.

It Was Up To Me To Sort It Out

Not long after this incident, my brother followed my older sister's example and left home to get away from all the fighting. He was the one who'd been there to defend my Mum, but now he'd left us all I felt it was up to me to save the family from my Dad. Funny thoughts run through your mind when you're cornered. I reasoned with myself that because I was only young I could do the unthinkable and get away with it. If I killed my Dad, I reasoned I was too young to be put in prison. The police would entirely understand why I'd done it because they knew what went on in our family. They'd probably take me away, put me in a home, and maybe some nice person would come along to foster or adopt me, and I'd live happily ever after.

I decided to kill my Dad during his sleep. I waited outside Mum and Dad's bedroom door in the dead of night with a carving knife in my hand, just waiting to hear my Dad snore. At this point I

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would go in and plunge the knife into him to free Mum from this monster.

I eventually heard the snoring, but my heart started to pound. It thumped so loudly in my chest that it almost deafened me. My Dad had very sensitive hearing and I thought, if I go into the room and he hears my heart pounding he'll wake up, see the knife, snatch it from me, and it would go into me not him. My head was filled with so many voices.

Eventually I backed down as I decided he wasn't worth dying for. I didn't realise it at the time, but God had saved me from doing something I'd regret for the rest of my life.

The Pastor Rescued Me

I don't know where I'd have been now if the pastor of the church we were attending hadn't noticed me. When things got too tough at home I'd pick up a discarded bus ticket from the floor, show it to the bus driver, and get a free ride to his house. I'd bang on his front door ranting at him, "Why has God allowed this to happen in our house? Doesn't he care about us? I thought you said God loved us?"

I remember doing this one day and he said, "Oh Joanna, I'm so glad you're here. My wife was feeling very unwell today so I prayed and asked God to send

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someone to help her ... and he sent you!” It sounded crazy that God would allow World War 3 to break out in our house just so that I would go round to help his wife, but it made me feel as though God not only cared but thought I had a purpose, and it was so warming to feel welcomed.

Me, A Secretary!

The pastor had two daughters around my age so I got very friendly with them and would often go to his house just to chill out with them. But one day he told me that if I learned how to type he'd make me his secretary, and this was too good an offer to miss. I went to night school and the following year, when I was only fifteen years old, he made me the church secretary and had my name printed on the church stationery letterhead. Now every Saturday I'd go round to his house to do some church work in his office situated in his cellar. But he used every possible opportunity to pour God into me.

Saturdays were the highlight of my week. No matter what I was experiencing at home my pastor would switch the conversation to tell me about how God was trying to transform me and make me like his precious son Jesus. Tests and trials are common to man, it's what we do with them that

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shapes us. He spent hours with me and my mind began to be renewed so that I could think right, think God, think there was and is a purpose for everything that went on in my life.

Around the same time it seemed every musically gifted person moved away from the church for one reason or another leaving nobody to play the piano for the meetings. I'd dabbled a bit and could just about play with two fingers, but he told me I could be the church pianist. The members were so patient with me as I gradually learned the instrument and got better each week. The pastor's son had a group and, because I'd always been good at singing and had often represented the school in competitions, it was a natural progression to sing in the church. As it happened he was also a music teacher so taught me all about chords enabling me to play the piano, and later on the organ in his group, as well as the church.

A New Life?

The following year my eldest sister, who, after her marriage emigrated to Australia, suggested that Mum and Dad did the same. It seemed a really good idea for them to get away from where they lived to start a new life where nobody knew them. Maybe things would be better out there. The problem was that I had made a life for myself in the church and

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refused to go with them. When trying to sort out the emigration the authorities said my parents couldn't leave me behind as I was too young to be on my own. They suggested they find a guardian for me, or forget the idea altogether. This was a real dampener – who would take me on, I was so rebellious? My parents mentioned their situation to the pastor and, quite incredibly, he said he'd sign all the legal documentation to become my guardian so they could emigrate. I was overjoyed! I'd only had a full time job for a year so wasn't making much money but I was determined that I'd stay in England even if I starved, so moved into a flat when I was sixteen.

My First Missions Trip

Oh, my life was so full! I practically lived at the pastor's house and the church. At seventeen years of age I went on my first missions trip to Holland for a month with the pastor and the music group, 'Sharon People'. This was the real deal, we were in the ministry now serving God every day. On that trip I made the decision that this was what I really wanted to do for the rest of my life realising God really did have a plan for me personally. If I hadn't experienced how bad things could be I don't think I'd have ever appreciated how good life is with God.

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You have no idea what love and mercy are unless you've seen how awful this world can be.

As it happens my parents never did go to Australia, this was just a scheme God had hatched up to get me out of that environment. Maybe he realised I couldn't have taken much more. God bent over backwards to show me how much he loves me.

Plagued By Nightmares

I'd been living on my own for a few years when I started to have nightmares about what I'd experienced as a child. Because the nightmares were worse than I'd actually experienced I used to wake up sweating, sobbing, being so terrified that I was almost afraid to go to sleep. I often went forward for prayer in the church asking for God to heal me, but the nightmares continued. Lack of sleep was wearing me down and I was becoming ill. I remember arriving for a group practice one evening and the leader, the pastor's son Maurice (whom I'm actually married to now), said I looked awful and asked if I was sick. I tried to fob him off by saying I wasn't sick I was just having difficulty sleeping. He asked what the difficulties were so I told him I was experiencing some nightmares. Upon hearing this he asked,

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"Have you got anything on your mind?"

"No!"

"Well what are the nightmares about?"

He was the pastor's son. The pastor had been so kind to me, listening patiently to all my woes, so I thought that maybe Maurice would do the same. Maybe he'd sympathise and give me a shoulder to cry on. But when I told him about the nightmares, I couldn't believe his reaction.

"Do you want to be a Christian?" He asked.

"Well that's a stupid question, I'm at every single meeting and I'm your Dad's secretary!"

But he was on a roll now.

"From the way you've explained your nightmares I can see you're full of bitterness and unforgiveness towards your parents. And the Bible says that if you say you love God and hate your brother you're a liar, and that goes for your father, mother, sister or brother. If you hate anyone yet say you love God you're a liar."

Forgiveness Is Not An Option

Then he went on to talk about the Lord's prayer and how Jesus had said we were to say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us," but at the end of the prayer Jesus had said that if we don't forgive men their trespasses, **from our**

heart, then neither will our Heavenly Father forgive us our trespasses. “So where does that leave you? You have an obligation. You can't come to God any way you like, you've got to play by his rules. Do you want to be a Christian?”

Well, I was fuming. He had no right whatsoever to talk to me like that because I'd seen what his home life was like, and in my opinion that was a bigger miracle than even raising the dead! He had no idea where I'd come from. I'd been brought up in Wythenshawe and the prisons were full of people from Wythenshawe. I didn't ask to be born! I certainly didn't ask to be born in that family. He had no right to say these things to me. I was so angry with him that I stormed out of the group practice and went home. I wanted so much to physically punch him. I was adamant that I wouldn't forgive my parents for what they did, they were Christians too and much older than me. It should be them coming to me with an apology as they'd caused all this problem in the first place. But the nightmares continued and God gradually wore me down.

I Didn't Want To Love Them

I started to reason with myself. I didn't want God to take the hatred out of my heart because I was afraid he'd replace it with love and I really didn't

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want to love my parents, they'd hurt me too much. But I did want to be a Christian, and the scriptures Maurice had spoken were like a sword in my spirit, cutting me up inside. I knew he was right, but I was so afraid to let go.

Eventually I told God I knew I was in the wrong. I asked him to forgive me, even though at that point I just couldn't forgive. But I'd seen, with my own eyes, many miracles in the church so I asked him to heal my heart – whatever that meant.

Peace At Last

Well, the fact that I'd acknowledged I had a problem made all the difference and the nightmares stopped immediately. I never had another one after that talk I had with God. Then an amazing thing happened. Over a period of time all the things my parents had shared about their own home situations as they were growing up, the things which I'd completely ignored because I just wasn't interested, well God began bringing these things to my mind and instead of blaming them for what they did. I started to realise that they too were products of their environment, just like me. Somehow the hatred faded away and was replaced with sympathy. And I don't know how it happened, or when, but love came into my heart

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for them and I really desired reconciliation and to have a relationship with them.

It doesn't matter who you are, or what sort of environment you grew up in, you're going to face hardships and difficulties, because as it says in the Bible in Job 5:7 ... 'Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.'

We think we've had it tough! But I found it heartbreaking to read the story of Joseph in the Bible. Joseph had ten older brothers whom you would have thought would dote on him as he was the son of his Dad's (Jacob's) old age and the baby of the family, but they were peevish, and hated the fact that their father favoured Joseph. These ten brothers envied Joseph so much that they actually wanted to kill him, and would have done so whilst out on the hills tending their father's sheep if traders hadn't been passing by. But when discussing it amongst themselves, they reasoned that if they killed Joseph they wouldn't benefit materially so decided to sell him as a slave for twenty pieces of silver instead, and watched without an ounce of pity as he was dragged away from them screaming for mercy. They were completely deaf to Joseph's cries. I think you have to experience rejection by your family first hand to ever appreciate the pain Joseph went through. There's nothing so crushing as this type of persecution.

Yet Joseph was God fearing and blessed with a godly disposition. No matter where he went, or who he worked for, he was singled out as a skilled, hard worker who got results. He earned the trust and respect of Potiphar, his first employer who was an Egyptian ruler, and was put in charge of all his estate. Joseph was in a tremendous position of authority yet didn't get conceited or allow his 'climb up the ladder' to go to his head. When Potiphar's wife tried to proposition him he made it very plain to her that she was the only thing he was not allowed to touch and he would not abuse the trust his employer had placed in him. Potiphar's wife, on the other hand, was furious when he rejected her. The ardent desire she'd previously had for him turned swiftly to anger, then to hatred – in fact she hated him so much that she declared he'd tried to rape her, and his boss, who believed her lies, had him flung into prison.

Persecuted For Righteousness Sake

Joseph must have searched his soul day and night wondering what he'd done to offend God. Why was it that no matter how hard he'd tried to honour God and serve those in authority over him, people always ended up both misinterpreting and misrepresenting him? And why was it people were so extreme in the way they dealt with him? They weren't content to

just hurt or punish him, they wanted to completely annihilate him. Why? Joseph must have been so utterly lonely, away from family, away from friends, thrown into prison for something he hadn't done. How low can you go? How crushed can you be?

But God was still working in his life. This was all part of the process. God couldn't achieve the vision he had for Joseph without putting him through all this crushing; the pain was actually making Joseph the person God had intended him to become. Here was a man utterly abandoned, with no friends, yet even here in the prison the warden in charge recognised God's favour upon him and put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners. He didn't concern himself with anything Joseph did because the Lord was with Joseph.

Jailbird To Prime Minister

Yet in this awful dark place Joseph must have felt completely alone, abandoned, and forgotten. So, what a shock when one day he was bathed and clothed, and brought before Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the then known world! God gave Joseph the interpretation of a dream which had troubled Pharaoh, and in a matter of a few minutes his station in life changed from prisoner to Prime Minister! This is one of the most amazing stories in

the Bible. God elevated this Hebrew, this nobody, so highly that he was actually running the whole country for Pharaoh! Not only that, under his direction he made the Pharaoh the most wealthy man on the planet, using the famine of that day to buy land, live-stock, and people in exchange for grain.

But the most amazing thing was Joseph's attitude when faced with his brothers. He could have inflicted so much damage on them. Next to the Pharaoh, Joseph was the most powerful man in the whole of Egypt, he could have completely destroyed his enemies. But God had done such a work in Joseph that he couldn't hold grudges. He even said to his brothers, "You meant it for harm, but God meant it for good." Because Joseph had not fought or resisted against the pressure, God had been able to perfect him so that not only his family had been saved from certain death, but the whole of Egypt, and many other nations round about.

God Has A Plan

My family didn't reject me because I was good, like Joseph, nevertheless it was still a painful experience. There's a scripture in the Bible which says, "all things work together for good", but the qualification is that you want to have a relationship

My Testimony

with God, you want to change your lifestyle and be out of the mess you're in. Did you know that you're unique, there are no two people alike in this entire world, and God has a specific plan and purpose for every one of us?

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (That's God's whole purpose, to make us like his son Jesus!) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified (he made them right): and whom he justified, them he also glorified (conformed them to the image of his son Jesus Christ). What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:28-31

The Bible is full of stories showing how people experienced devastating trials only to find themselves in glorious situations later on in life because they allowed God to dig up their

My Testimony

old sinful nature and make a brand new man or woman out of them fashioned like unto his precious and obedient son, Jesus the Christ. Maybe you're not aware of this, but God is the Master Potter and we are just lumps of clay which need to be moulded, shaped, fired, and glazed. Stay on the wheel and allow the Lord to stretch, pull, and pummel. He knows what he's doing. Our problem is that we've not seen the blue print, nor have we had the vision of what our lives were destined to become. Only God knows that. But I'm absolutely certain that if you allow God to have his perfect way in your life, without complaint or resistance, God won't be the only one pleased with the result ... I'm sure that you'll be delighted also with what you can become, in this life, by God's grace.

Chapter Three

Are You Becoming Better Or Worse?

People didn't have bathroom scales when I was a kid, we used to go round to the local chemist shop because they had a large weighing machine which you stood on. The big dial was high up so that you didn't need to bend down to see it, and the needles pointed out your weight. When I was around nine years old I remember my mum being weighed, maybe because she was pregnant, she let me have a go as well, and the scales in the chemist's shop were really accurate. So, when I was around 13 or 14 and somebody asked me how much I weighed I said, "4 stone 7." They stared at me in disbelief and said, "What! When did you last get

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weighed?" That was when I found out it didn't work like that.

It's amazing how we can keep hold of an impression of what we were like during one phase of our lives and forget that with the passing of time things change. We change whether we like it or not and without realising it often we've become quite different.

Guard Your Heart

You may have had a wonderful revelation and encounter with God at the beginning of your walk with him, but if you don't guard diligently your heart you can very quickly grow cold and backslide. Changes come with the passing of time. One of my sons who's living in his own apartment remarked at how dusty his spare bedroom got. I remember him saying to me in a really confused way, "And I don't even go in there to dirty it!"

You only have to look at your garden to know this is true. Unless you tend your plants regularly weeds and brambles will take over and it'll become wild in a very short time. You then have a massive job on your hands to put it right again.

Some time ago I read something in the Bible which really made me stop and think. You'll remember the story of Samuel who, as a child, was given by his mother to God to be brought up in the

Are You Becoming Better Or Worse?

temple by Eli, the high priest. Well one night whilst he was very young the LORD awoke him from his sleep calling his name. It took God three attempts before Samuel finally realised it was the voice of God he was hearing.

And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for your servant hears. And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that hears it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knows; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

1 Samuel 3:10-14

When the children of Israel were travelling through the wilderness after escaping Egypt, God told Moses to make him a sanctuary so that he could dwell among them. They were to make an ark (or a box) of shittim wood, overlay it with gold, and put the 10 commandments

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inside. On top of this was placed a mercy seat made of pure gold. Then they were to make two cherubims of gold which were to cover the mercy seat with their stretched out wings as they faced each other looking toward the mercy seat. And God said to Moses,

There I will meet with you, and I will commune with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony.

Exodus 25:22

Cover The Ark!

God kept this promise. The ark was covered with a special curtain and only specified Israelite priests were allowed to carry it on poles. Nobody was allowed to touch it, nor look inside it, and wherever the ark of God went battles were won and miracles happened. The surrounding nations who witnessed these signs and wonders were in awe and dread of this God the Israelites served. They knew he was to be feared because he was so powerful. So when I read this, which I'm just about to share with you in 1 Samuel 4, I sat in amazement as I contemplated the implications.

It so happened that the Israelites were at war with the Philistines but were nonplussed as to why they were being defeated.

Are You Becoming Better Or Worse?

The Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about 4,000 men. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it comes among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwells between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.

1 Samuel 4:2-11

The entire Israelite camp were encouraged because they felt that God had come right into the middle of the battle and would give them victory over their enemies.

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What does the noise of

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this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there has not been such a thing before. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

1 Samuel 4:6-8

They were terrified because of all that this almighty God had done to other nations before them. But they rallied round, and their officers gave them strong battle speeches to put backbone into them.

Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O you Philistines, that you be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel 30,000 footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas (the priests), were slain.

1 Samuel 4:9-11

God is No Respector Of People

Well, God had forewarned Samuel and Eli saying, "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that hears it shall tingle," but they never imagined for one moment that this 'new thing' could be so devastating. The children of Israel thought that because they were God's chosen people they were entitled to preferential treatment, but that wasn't the case. The Bible says God is no respecter of persons, meaning status and reputation is of no consequence to him. He not only sees what we do, he also sees WHY we do what we do, and that's what he judges.

The children of Israel, God's chosen people, were serving Baalim and Ashteroth at the same time as they were calling upon the name of the LORD God Jehovah, they didn't even realise their error. Eli's sons, who were priests, were taking advantage of their office making themselves vile before God, and Eli didn't restrain them. When God said he'd do a new thing in Israel he meant exactly what he said and it rocked them to the very core. He allowed the ark to be stolen by the enemy.

God removed his holy spirit from them. David said in the Psalms ...

Are You Becoming Better Or Worse?

Cast me not away from your presence; and
take not your holy spirit from me.

Psalms 51:11

He said this because he'd witnessed personally what God had done to King Saul, his predecessor, because of his disobedience. When Samuel had anointed David God had put his spirit upon him, but at the same time he'd removed his spirit from Saul. Isaiah 63:10 says that Israel rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore God was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. Jesus said this in the gospel of Mark ...

Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost has never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:

Mark 3:28-29

That word blaspheme means : To speak evil against, or To levy a false charge against, with the intent to damage someone's reputation or standing. So this is the most serious of sins if Jesus said it will never be forgiven.

Are You Becoming Better Or Worse?

After the ark had been with the Philistines seven months it was then brought into the house of Abinadab where Eleazar his son kept it, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. God used Samuel for 40 years to judge and deliver the Israelites from their enemies, then he used King Saul for 40 years to reign and deliver them; but the ark wasn't brought back to its resting place until the reign of David, which was at least 70 years after it had been stolen, when it was recovered from the house of Abinadab.

We mustn't take God's presence for granted just because we're his children. If we continually do the things God hates and despises then we'll reap the consequences in this life, and worse still in the life to come. God said in Genesis 6:3 ... 'My spirit shall not always strive with man.' He was saying in effect that he wouldn't plead or contend forever with people, because he's given us all free will. If we refuse to hear his voice and amend our ways then he'll leave us to our own devices and we'll face his judgement.

It's possible that you may not even be aware of what God hates ... so just in case I'll read a short list to help you.

Proverbs 6:16-19 tells us exactly the things God hates :

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1. A proud look,
2. A lying tongue,
3. Hands that shed innocent blood,
4. An heart that devises wicked imaginations,
5. Feet that are swift in running to mischief,
6. A false witness that speaks lies,
7. A person who sows discord among brethren.

This last one is actually an abomination unto him ... A person who sows discord among brethren.

If you've known God and turned away from him then it's much harder to get back to him than it ever was to find him in the first place. If God removes his spirit from you it's because he's warned you many times beforehand that coldness is creeping into your heart and you've ignored his voice. We all need to ask God to search us, try us, and see if there's anything despicable in us which offends him. We really do need to keep short accounts with God.

Guard your heart, keep weeding that garden because every single day brings changes.

Chapter Four

Jewish Roots

A few years ago I was walking through the heart of Manchester and as I approached Piccadilly Gardens saw a crowd of people who were visiting the city, of various nationalities, either taking full on photos of a huge statue of Queen Victoria, or taking 'selfies' with her in the background. That wasn't unusual at all as it's hard to spot somebody looking typically English in Manchester. But one particular man stood out to me from the crowd as he was clicking away on his camera, and I was intrigued.

As I got level with him I shouted to get his attention, "You certainly don't look like a tourist!"

He spun around looking quizzically to where the remark had come from. I gave him a big, beaming smile and said laughingly,

"I don't normally see people dressed in three-piece suits on a hot summers day taking photos of old Queen Vic! You're definitely not from around here."

He chuckled and we started to chat briefly.

Apparently he'd flown into Manchester for a conference and was on his lunch break. When he told me which country he was actually from, saying he was a Jew, I got really excited.

"Oh, how wonderful!" I said. "I'm a Christian. I love Jews, they're the people of my God!"

He stared at me, looking me full in the face and asked,

"And which God do you believe in then?" So I said,

"The same God as you! The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,"

"I thought you Christians hated Jews because we killed your Jesus!"

"You're joking!" I said. "I love Jews! They gave me my Jesus!"

His eyes nearly popped out of his head. He told me his lunch break was up and he needed to get back to the office, but as he hastily walked off I knew what I'd said had stunned him.

There's so much ignorance in this world. Jews believe that Christians hate them because 2000 years ago, incited by the religious leaders of the day,

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Pontius Pilate was pressurised into crucifying Jesus at their insistence. And in all honesty many Christians feel this way because of anti-Semitic propaganda. But true gentile Believers in Jehovah, who have read the Bible and have an understanding of the plan of God, can only be grateful and have a love for the true Israel of God because they gave us Jesus Christ our precious Lord and Saviour.

The Samaritans

It was the same in Jesus's day. There were a group of people who were called Samaritans because they lived in Samaria – an area north of Jerusalem. They were a mixed breed. When Assyria captured the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. Some were taken into captivity and replaced by Assyrians. It so happened that the Israelis left behind intermarried with the Assyrians, which consequently meant their offspring were neither fully Hebrew nor fully Gentile. At the time of Jesus the Jews and the Samaritans would not deal with one another. Jesus even instructed his disciples to keep away from them.

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of

Jewish Roots

the Samaritans enter not: but go rather
to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'

Matthew 10:5

Yet it's clear from scripture that Jesus didn't abide by this rule. He proved he wasn't prejudiced against them because he ministered to the people of Samaria preaching to them the good news of salvation.

The Woman At The Well

Have you ever read in John chapter 4 that when Jesus went through the city of Samaria he came to a well and a Samaritan woman came to draw water?

It was Jesus who started off the dialogue by saying,

"Give me to drink."

The woman was amazed and said, "How is it that you, being a Jew, is asking for a drink from me, a Samaritan?" Because everyone knew full well the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

Well, Jesus didn't only take a drink of water from this woman, but he entered into a full-blown, in depth, conversation with her about her promiscuous lifestyle, telling her things he couldn't possibly have known unless God had revealed them to him. And rather than being offended by what

he said, she marvelled, realising he was no ordinary man and wanted to talk about spiritual things to him.

Sir, I perceive that you're a prophet! Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him."

John 4:20-23

Here's another account where Jesus didn't discriminate against Samaritans:

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices,

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and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" And when he saw them, he said to them, "Go show yourselves unto the priests." And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at Jesus's feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

Luke 17:11-16

Jesus Even Defended The Samaritans

And it came to pass, when the time was come that Jesus should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. But they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?" But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, "You know not what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man is not come to

Jewish Roots

destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went to another village.

Luke 9:51-56

In Matthew chapter 15 Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," but who are we to know who the 'lost sheep' are? When Jesus came the first time he came as a prophet, and God revealed his lost children to him, that's why he could interact and heal the very ones he'd told his disciples to steer well clear of. Many people call themselves Jews, and children of Abraham, but Abraham had many sons, he had a son to Hagar, then six more sons to Keturah. But it's the lost children of Isaac whom God is seeking. Isaac, the son Abraham miraculously had through Sarah, who was not only barren but was 90 years old when she bore him. Those who are born of this spiritual seed, not of fleshly seed. It's nothing to do with having Jewish blood in your veins, it's whether God has sown his seed within you.

I remember being given a leaflet when I was a little child of about five or six years old, just an infant at school. It was advertising children's meetings at a local Brethren church just around the corner from where I lived. Mum and Dad were happy to let me go as it kept me out of their hair for a few hours and I felt grown up going to a club

on my own. But then I heard those stories from the Bible ... Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace; Daniel in the lion's den; Moses opening the Red Sea; Joshua and the walls of Jericho falling down; and then Peter walking on water! I would get so excited and enthralled I thought my little heart would burst. They told us stories of Jesus but somehow these weren't as impressive as the others because in my mind Jesus was the son of God and I just expected that he could do miracles. But when I heard about what ordinary people who were dedicated to God could do ... Wow! My heart was just filled with wonder and awe.

Eyes Wide Open

Elijah going up to heaven in a chariot of fire being pulled by horses of fire! Can you imagine it? A child is so impressionable. I'd listen to these stories with my eyes as wide as saucers. I believed every single story that was read to me from the Bible and imagined myself being in those situations.

Paul says in Ephesians 1:13 that after we heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation: in whom also we believed, we were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. And he reminded Timothy that from a child he'd known the holy scriptures,

which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Seeds are incredible things. They can be so tiny yet know exactly how to grow. One tiny seed can become a flower, a fruit, a vegetable, a weed, or even a mighty tree which will last for 100's of years. It has all the information, the DNA, inside it to be what it's meant to be if given the right conditions such as good soil, water, and sunshine. If God has planted his seed in you, then I want to assure you, his seed knows exactly how to grow. All it needs are the right conditions: the right soil – which is a tender heart; water – which is the word of God; and sunshine – we need to fellowship with God and fellowship with true Believers. You certainly don't need to trace your ancestry to find out whether you have Jewish blood, or be circumcised, to be a child of Abraham for the Bible says:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Romans 2:28

Jesus has broken down that wall which separated Jews from Gentiles.

Jewish Roots

Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of two one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Ephesians 2:11

As far as God is concerned being a Jew is no better than being a Muslim because they can both trace their ancestry back to Abraham. We all know that if a Muslim becomes a Believer in Jesus Christ he has to get rid of his religion, well, that's exactly the same for the Jew. He has to get rid of his religion too. It doesn't matter what nationality you are, or religion you adhere to, Paul said Jesus Christ alone is our foundation. Jews and Gentiles can be brothers in Christ, because Jesus has destroyed what divided us. He abolished, in his flesh, the law of commandments contained in ordinances; to make in himself of two, Jew and Gentile, one new man. He was a peacemaker; he reconciled us both to God by dying on the cross and thereby killed all hostility.

Cornelius

The Bible, in Acts chapter 10, doesn't indicate that Cornelius, a Gentile Roman Centurion, participated in any of the feasts of the Old Covenant, yet God sent an angel to him who said he'd been noticed by God. His prayers and almsgiving had come up for a memorial before God, and because of this God actually commissioned Peter to pay him a visit. Peter openly said to Cornelius, "You know it's an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but

God showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Why did you send for me? How can I help you?"

Cornelius told Peter about the vision he'd recently seen whilst fasting and praying, and how the angel had told him to send for Peter. He even told him where Peter lived, and said that Peter would tell him what he needed to hear when he came!

Well, Peter was astonished, and realised that God was no respecter of persons, but accepted anyone who feared him and lived a righteous lifestyle, so preached to him about Jesus Christ, saying that whoever believed on him would have their sins blotted out. And whilst he was saying these things the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and those whom he'd assembled to listen to Peter, and they all spoke in tongues, just like the disciples had done on the day of Pentecost.

Jewish roots? Nah, that's a bum steer, you need to go a whole lot further up the ladder than that. You need to be a child of Abraham who came out of religion to worship God in spirit and truth. You don't need religion, Jewish or otherwise, you need a personal relationship with God.

Chapter Five

Rejection

Even though God had both chosen and given Saul a new heart to enable him to be the first king over Israel he just couldn't find it in himself to follow God's instructions. He had to do things his own way. We serve a very forgiving God who gives people lots of chances, but if he's selected someone for a job in a prominent position where people look up to them as their example, then if they disobey him he has to deal severely with them because they're not allowed to take the name of the Lord in vain.

God spoke to Saul through Samuel saying:

But now your kingdom shall not continue: the LORD has sought him a man after his own

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heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be captain over his people, because you have not kept that which the LORD commanded you.

1 Samuel 13:14

God said this after Saul had reigned only two years, that's eight years before David was even born! Just a couple of chapters later Samuel was again sent to reprimand Saul for his disobedience.

And Samuel said unto Saul, The LORD has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbour of yours, that is better than you.

1 Samuel 15:28

David was now alive and **God had been watching** him.

And when God had removed Saul, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Acts 13:22

'Man after God's own heart': what a statement! What made David a man after God's own heart? I'm going to

Rejection

quote some scriptures to show David experienced and suffered the same emotional pain in his heart that God did. You see David knew all about rejection.

But you are he that took me out of the womb: you did make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon you from the womb: you are my God from my mother's belly.

Psalms 22:9-10

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

Psalms 27:10

Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For you are my hope, O Lord GOD: you are my trust from my youth. By you have I been holden up from the womb: you are he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of you. I am as a wonder unto many; but you are my strong refuge.

Psalms 71:4-7

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in

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great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

Psalms 131:1-2

I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.

Psalms 69:8

You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.

Psalms 50:20

From David's Psalms we can see clearly how he felt regarding his upbringing. He didn't feel like an accepted member of this family. So what an incredible thing for God to instruct Samuel to fill his horn with oil, and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for God had provided himself a king from among his sons.

Now Jesse was an old man, an elder who stood at the gate of Bethlehem. And Samuel did that which the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Do you come peaceably? And he said, Peaceably:

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I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

1 Samuel 16:4-5

So all Jesse's family sanctified themselves and came for the meal. Jesse introduced each of his sons to Samuel but there was **no David**. David hadn't even been informed about the visit of this extremely honoured guest. Well, Samuel wouldn't proceed without him.

No David – No meal!

And the amazing thing about this was that, even after Samuel made it abundantly clear that his visit had been all about David by anointing him in front of his father and brethren, David was sent back out to the field. Samuel hadn't said he was anointing him to be the next king, but surely they must have realised something very special was going on here. Talk about distraint!

Well, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. Because of this Saul's servants looked for a minstrel who could refresh him. David

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seemed to have earned a reputation for the Psalms he sang so was brought to the palace to be employed as Saul's minstrel and armour bearer. At last, David felt he had been recognised and had earned some respect but, sadly, no respect came from his family because when war broke out between Israel and the Philistines David, who was at that time must have been in his teens and too young to join the army, was sent back home. His father soon put him in his place, sending him back into the field to take care of the sheep. David was forever being humiliated.

David Was Amazed

Shortly after returning home David's father sent him on an errand to the battle ground as he wanted to know how his sons were doing. David was packed off with cheeses for the captains of the army, and bread and corn for his three brothers who were supposed to be fighting out there. But what he witnessed amazed him!

One single Philistine – Goliath, a huge man who was 10 feet tall – was shouting from the valley, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."

This Goliath was challenging the whole army of Israel to choose a man to face him. If one Israelite could fight him, and kill him, then all the

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Philistines would serve Israel: but if he prevailed, and killed the Israelite, then all Israel would be servants.

King Saul and the whole Israelite army were petrified, and David couldn't believe it! He looked around and all he could see was Israel looking like a flock of scared sheep.

The Rewards Of Victory

Just then he overheard men talking of reward so David asked around: "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine anyway that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Apparently there was a huge reward being offered: the victor would have great riches from the King; marry the King's daughter; and his father's house would be permanently free of taxes and obligations. What an incentive! ... If he could rid Israel of this terrible threat he would surely be accepted as a valued member of his family.

Eliab, David's eldest brother, overheard the conversation and was livid! "Why are you here? Who have you left those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know your pride and haughtiness, you've only come to see the battle!"

Rejection

Well, you know what happened, David cut Goliath's head off. But the strange thing is that when Saul saw David go up against Goliath, he said to the captain of the host, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "I don't know."

And Saul said, "Enquire whose son the stripling is."

So as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner brought him before Saul with Goliath's head in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?"

And David answered, "I'm the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite." David had already been working in the palace, in the very presence of Saul playing and singing for him, but he realised yet again that he'd never even been noticed.

Rejection

You know, everyone has experienced rejection in some measure, it's common to man. And rejection comes in many forms. From early days children know what rejection is like when they're not picked for the football team, or not invited to someone's birthday party, or not included in a circle of friends. As we grow older it's hard to take rejection when applications for colleges, universities, or job interviews are turned down. It gets even more painful when a boyfriend or

Rejection

girlfriend you've become emotionally involved with decide they can do better for themselves and move on to somebody new. And how agonising is rejection when the very one you have committed to spend the rest of your life with decides they don't love you any more and want out of the marriage – and worse still if it's because they've already found someone else? In one form or another our hearts go through the mangle during the course of our lifetime. But what do we do about it?

I know people who have become so bitter that all they want is revenge. Because they've been shunned by their spouse they fight a legal battle in the divorce courts to 'take their partner to the cleaners', suing them for every penny to strip them completely.

In France during the 19th century 'Crimes of Passion' was a valid legal defence for murder charges. It was allowed because they understood the emotional anguish lovers experience when rejected, even causing them to commit murder!

Many people become so hard hearted and untrusting that they build walls to protect ourselves, vowing that nobody will ever hurt them again.

In the book of Isaiah it prophesied of Jesus:

He is despised and **rejected of men**; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and

Rejection

we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53:3

Jesus knew what to expect from people:

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:31

But first must Jesus suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

Luke 17:25

Many years ago a young woman started attending the church I belonged to. I was intrigued because she was a Muslim so asked her what brought her to faith in our God Jehovah and the Lord Jesus Christ. She said, "I read the Bible."

So I said, "Yeah, I've read the Bible. Which part did you read?"

She looked a bit puzzled then said, "It's a book! I started at the beginning."

She went on to tell me that after only reading through the first couple of books she was heartbroken

Rejection

over this suffering God. She felt so sorry for him. It seemed he had bent over backwards to win the love of the people he'd created, from his complete indulgence in the Garden of Eden, then starting all over again with Noah after his perfect creation had been ruined, but especially when God rescued the Children of Israel from Egypt with all his mighty signs and wonders. It seemed to her mankind had just kept slapping God in the face and abusing him over and over again. She said she just wanted to let this God know that somebody loved and appreciated him.

God's Rejection

David knew all about rejection, but he loved God with his whole heart. And maybe because he himself had suffered so much, he wanted God to feel loved and wanted, just like this young Ex-Muslim woman did. He hated the way God was mistreated. When David became king he looked for ways to practically and openly bless his precious God. It was in his heart that he wanted to build God a house rather than him just being in a box, and even though God wouldn't allow David to personally build it because he'd murdered in his past, David drew up the plans under God's directions and provided all the necessary materials to make and furnish it – all

Rejection

the wood, gold, silver, fabric, everything, so that his son Solomon could erect it. Solomon's Temple, as we call it, is actually David's Temple because Solomon just carried out the work David had commissioned.

So listen, you're in good company when you're experiencing rejection. It's not necessarily a negative thing. All the prophets of God and the disciples of Jesus Christ were rejected, and a vast majority of them were martyred. Jesus said we had to beware when all men speak well of us for so persecuted they the prophets which were before us.

Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets

Luke 6:26

If you're following Jesus Christ then you mustn't expect to get treated better than he did. But if we take our rejection patiently, Jesus said this is thankworthy and great would be our reward in Heaven.

If you want to be a man after God's heart, embrace the rejection. Jesus was despised and rejected of men. And if you're suffering for righteousness' sake you're learning to understand your Lord.

Those who suffer with Christ will reign with Christ.

Chapter Six

Jesus Or Yashua... What's In A Name?

I don't know about you, but I often intercept phone calls for my husband from people who ask in a very familiar way, as though they know him personally, "Can I speak with William please?" I know perfectly well they don't know him, and he certainly doesn't know them, just because they've used his first name. He prefers to be known as Maurice rather than William, so the salesmen are easily spotted.

I've sometimes been corrected by people influenced by the Hebrew Roots teaching because they think I should call Jesus by his proper name, which they say is Yeshua. I don't know whether

Jesus Or Yashua... What's In A Name?

you've come across these people too. I'm talking about groups of gentile Believers who affirm basic tenets of Christianity, gather together in churches, but yet emphasize specific dates of the Hebrew calendar, celebrate Jewish feasts, and prefer to refer to Jesus Christ as Yeshua, the Messiah. But I'd just like to bring this passage of scripture to you:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that EVERY TONGUE SHOULD CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

All of the New Testament authors wrote Scripture in Koine Greek, which was the common

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language of the Eastern Mediterranean world at that time. Paul, Christ's apostle, who wrote two-thirds of our New Testament, **does not refer to Jesus as Yeshua HaMashiach**, but writes his name in the Greek form which is **Iesous** and sounds like ee-ay-soos. He doesn't make any effort to keep the Hebrew origin and insert it into his letter because it was written in Greek and translated into the language he was writing in. So obviously anyone translating the Bible into different languages would use their equivalent as it was a common name, not some name that was divine. Evidently, for Paul, saying the Son of God's name in its Greek form was sufficient in identifying him with the God of Israel and calling him 'Lord.'

Yeshua Or Jesus?

Personally, I don't believe non-Hebrew speaking people should be concerned with saying 'Yeshua' instead of 'Jesus' (or whatever name a particular language uses as its translation) because the Apostles were not concerned with it, and since the Apostles were Jesus' hand-selected 'sent ones' to preach the gospel, establish churches, write Scripture, and establish the doctrine of the church until Jesus comes back, we should view them as our final authority on all matters concerning how to be saved and how to

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honour God in our lives. The name Jesus means 'The Lord Saves' or 'The Lord Is Salvation' so whether you say Jesus, or Jezus, or Yeshua, the meaning stays the same.

I also don't think there's any need to be interested in rediscovering the Hebrew Roots of Christianity for the simple reason that the Apostles didn't seem interested in spreading their Hebrew roots culture. So far as Paul was concerned, 'There's neither Jew nor Greek, there's neither slave nor free, there's no male and female, for we're all one in Christ Jesus'. He also emphasised that Christ broke down in his flesh the wall of hostility that divided us all.

Preaching The Gospel

The apostles weren't concerned in spreading Jewish heritage or culture; they were concerned with preaching the gospel. And the name 'Jesus' itself doesn't save, but the person the name identifies.

As I read the Bible it looks to me like the disciples, his own familiar friends, didn't even seem to use Jesus's name when addressing him, they called him Rabbi, or Master, or Lord not meaning God, but rather 'the person I serve'. But more important than how to address Jesus is, do you know him personally and does he know you? Let me just bring you something else from scripture.

Jesus Or Yashua... What's In A Name?

Mary Magdalene had gone early in the morning to Jesus's tomb but was horrified to see the stone had been rolled away and the tomb empty. Distraught she ran back to tell the disciples and two of them went back to the tomb with her. Once they'd confirmed what she said they returned home.

But Mary stood outside the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they've taken away my Lord, and I know not where they've laid him." And when she had said this, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, but didn't know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? whom do you seek?" She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, "Sir, if you've borne him hence, tell me where you've laid him, and I'll take him away." Jesus said unto her, "Mary. She turned herself, and said to him, "Rabboni;" which is to say, Master.

John 20:11

Jesus Or Yashua... What's In A Name?

Did you read that? When Jesus had asked her why she was crying, she'd actually looked at him and thought he was just the gardener. But as soon as he'd said her name she immediately recognised him, her eyes were opened, and she called him 'Rabboni'. It was the voice, the intimacy of knowing her that made all the difference.

I Couldn't Recognise My Own Baby

Because I'd had a Caesarean operation when delivering my first baby I was put in a room on my own in the hospital to recover whilst Nathan was in the adjoining room with some other babies. But every time I heard a baby crying I dashed into the room thinking it could have been my child in distress. That is, until one of the midwives caught me and said, "Don't you recognise the sound of your own baby yet?" She was laughing when she said it, but it actually embarrassed me. From then on I really listened attentively.

Have you ever seen the film "March of the Penguins"? What an incredible film that is. Thousands of Emperor Penguins, all crowded together in the frozen Antarctica can distinguish the voice of their own, individual mate when returning with food, and know the sound of their own baby amongst all the other babies ... the squawking and crying sounds like bedlam!

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You know yourself when receiving phone calls that we can distinguish individual voices with no trouble at all, and that's just with familiarity because we've heard them a few times. They don't even need to be the voices of a relative or intimate friend either.

It's our hearts and spirits that communicate. Why do we get so hung up about names and being proper? I have both a very respectful and intimate relationship with my husband and quite often we don't even use our names when addressing one another, we'll use other endearing expressions appropriate at the time.

Religion Or Love?

If Jesus did anything at all whilst he was on this earth and teaching through his lifestyle he showed us that God wasn't interested in religion and performing out of duty. He wants above all things for us to love him passionately and be real. If we have an intimate relationship with him then it should, by definition, be very personal and different to everyone else's. Find out what your dear Lord and Saviour wants to hear you call him and change your attitude. Don't judge or criticise others for not using the same name you use. Allow them to have a personal relationship too.

Chapter Seven

Bad Company Corrupts Good Morals

In the book of Titus we read this...

Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Titus 1:15

Does God automatically know each of our hearts? Does he need permission from us to gain access to our hearts? He knows mankind's heart generally, as we can see from what's been written in Genesis;

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And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

Genesis 6:5-6

Reading this you would think God was surprised at how wicked man could become. It's as though he never expected it.

But Jesus did not commit himself unto them (he wouldn't place his confidence in man), because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

John 2:24-25

Yes, Jesus, too, 'knew what was in man'. But as for the secrets of each individual heart, it seems that people have to ask God to search them, as David did. Without us giving God the right to do so, we have no guarantee that he will. He may just leave us to it. Certainly, we need to give God the right to change our hearts once he's revealed them to us. And this is a relevant point, because it's the only way to get a pure

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heart. We can't become pure ourselves. God has as to change us.

When I was a very young girl I used to look forward to Saturdays. With our pockets full of money my friend and I would catch the bus to the Amusement Park at Belle View. It's been closed for quite a number of years now but when it was open it used to house a circus big top, zoo, and a fun fair with all sorts of thrilling rides. We'd been going to this fun fair for a few weeks so I was getting quite blasé about it, but at first I remember feeling very nervous and frightened. I was eleven years old and had already had a very good moral education at Sunday School. A well known verse to all of us Sunday School children was, 'Be sure your sins will find you out,' but as God's wrath hadn't fallen upon me immediately I began to think he didn't view ME as the sinner after all, but rather regarded my friend as the culprit.

Working Class

You see, I grew up in Wythenshawe, which has always been a very poor district of Manchester, made up of the 'working class' who survived mostly on the 'dole' money the government handed out. My friend lived in a house at the

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top of the avenue in which I lived and was the same age as myself, but her Dad was one of the fortunate ones who had a job with an insurance company making house calls collecting the client's payments every week. When he came home each evening his pockets would be stuffed with money, so during the night my friend used to rifle through them and take out some of his collections. Some weeks my friend and I would have as much as £20 each to spend, which was a fortune back in the 60's, and what we didn't get rid of at Belle View we'd use during the week to buy sweets, chocolates, and all sorts of trivia. I'd never known what it was like to have money before so this experience was terrific. With so much money I could even afford to be benevolent!

Always Short Of Money

From as far back as I can remember Mum always seemed to have financial struggles. Dad never seemed to be in occupation for very long, being on the sick quite a lot of the time for one reason or another, some of which I remember were quite genuine! At that time Dad used to give Mum £10 each week and out of that sum she had to pay the rent, gas, coal, electricity, bus fares, as well as buy food, clothes, and other essentials. Consequently she learned how

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to make her money stretch and we were thoughtfully taught the art of thrift. We'd go to the baker's shop just before closing time on Saturday evenings or very early on a Monday morning for any stale bread or cake that they might still have. This was also the way we bought our vegetables, and as far as meat was concerned we were always amazed at what the butcher was prepared to sell as 'scraps for the dog'. Mum would take us to jumble sales instructing us to buy really big garments which we'd bring home, unpick, cut out again, and remake into more stylish clothes for ourselves.

I Used Deception

Well, one particular week I remember Mum having more expenses than normal and she was worried about not having enough money. I knew I had money that I hadn't managed to spend yet and dearly wanted to give it to her, but was afraid she might ask too many questions. So, after a lot of thought, I went outside and rubbed a £5 note in the dirt of our front garden before bringing it in to her, telling her that I'd just found it on the ground

Mum could hardly believe her eyes. After all, £5 was half her normal weekly income. She began to jump around the living room with her arms raised in the air shouting, "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Praise

the Lord! Thank you Jesus!" She also tried to thank me but I couldn't take it. She honestly believed that God had given her that money, and suddenly the stark reality of what I was doing hit me. My hands hadn't personally taken the money from my friend's father's pocket, but my hands had readily accepted and spent it, and the bald truth of what I'd done filled me with horror. Without realising it Mum was thanking Jesus because I was a thief, and I felt embarrassed and ashamed.

Humble Beginnings

I'm grateful for my humble beginnings as I've had to learn how to manage the small amounts of money I've earned. At the age of 16 I left home and, with only a very small wage coming in each week, I moved into a flat. My rent was £3, then there was gas, electricity, travelling expenses to and from work, tights and personal needs, and with what was left I'd buy food. Out of £5.50 a week there wasn't usually much left so my food bill had to be subsidised with the luncheon vouchers I received in some firms as part of my wages. I was always frightened of debt so would never consider taking anything on hire purchase in case I wasn't in the position to pay the instalments. I got by and over the years my

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advancing age, plus inflation, put me in a better financial position; but I'd never consider myself to have been 'flush'.

When I was in my early 20's my Pastor made a big appeal for finance to buy a central heating system. The church oversight had decided to take out the old-fashioned overhead electric heaters which were a drain on the financial resources of the church and very inefficient as they'd burn your head whilst your feet froze. They intended to install radiators which would do a better job and make the heating more cost effective so the Pastor challenged the church for a certain number of individual members to pledge £200 over the course of a 6-month period. I can't remember how many sponsors he needed because it was a long time ago, but I do remember my heart being filled with a desire to be one of those sponsors.

I Feared Debt

My fears concerning financial debt had never gone away, but I really wanted to prove my dedication to God, and the church, by this sacrifice. At the time I was working for a temporary employment agency and knew that any day I could get a phone call to say that there was no job for me the following week, so I prayed really hard asking

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God to make sure that for the next 6 months I was kept in full time employment. Then, in faith, made my commitment to give £200 to the church.

Every month after this commitment I made out my cheque for the allotted amount and never missed one payment. At the end of the 6-month period I felt a tremendous sense of relief knowing that I was free from my debt, but I also felt a wonderful warm sense of satisfaction knowing that I'd sacrificed and given from a pure heart. It had cost me a great deal but it had been well worth it because I'd done it all myself, and it was given from my heart.

A Double Life

There are many ways in which we can indulge in impure hearts and motives, and I could bring many examples from my own experience of times when I'd have loved to indulge if God hadn't had mercy on me and pricked my conscience. People were constantly praising me for my 'spirituality' and 'growth in the Lord' just because I was involved in so many activities in the church. I desperately wanted to accept their compliments, but God wouldn't allow me to hide from the truth – which was that I was living a double life, church one minute, night clubs the next – because in reality I was living a lie.

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God has to sort us out and expose us to ourselves. It hurts, yes, but I was really grateful he kept me soft inside. The real danger is when we harden up and refuse to face the truth; it's then that God can't help us without something really drastic happening. And more often than not he lets those half-hearted and rebellious people carry on believing lies before he eventually "hands them over to a reprobate mind".

If you want to be godly and live a holy life then find people whom you can look to as examples or role models and stick to them like glue. We need people around us who are stronger and more dedicated than we are. The Bible exhorts us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (as the manner of some is) but to exhort one another to love and good works. We all need fellowship. We all need to be in good company.

The pure in heart can look at, and thank God, when somebody blesses and praises them. But the impure in heart, if there's any honesty at all in them, cringe and want to hide in shame. I know!

Chapter Eight

When The Need Becomes Personal, It's A Call

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

Exodus 2:5-6

Funny how things happen, isn't it? That little child in the basket was Moses. Because the Egyptian princess

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heard him cry and had compassion on him his life was spared from certain death. She saw his need and felt the call to help so spontaneously made an unpremeditated decision and ended up doing something completely unexpected. She didn't love the child, she'd had no relationship with it until that very moment, but she'll surely receive her reward for what she did.

Burden Of The Churches

Maurice and I haven't been called to evangelism. Maurice often says that he doesn't lose sleep at night crying about lost souls. Actually his heart cries for those in the church who call themselves Christians and yet live just like the world because he's a teacher, not an evangelist. These Christians have the same world view as unbelievers; they listen to the same music; participate in the same activities; talk the same talk; walk the same walk, and have the same life style as the very people who oppose God, and Maurice yearns to teach them the difference between Christianity – the religion, and Discipleship – which is the need to be separate and holy for God's purposes. Maurice knows his calling and so never accepts invitations to preach the gospel, only to teach.

So, it was quite amazing to be fervently asked by an elderly Indian Pastor to visit his church in Andhra Pradesh and **teach** the ministers whom he had

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trained. This man, Pastor Samuel, was surrounded by Hindu fanatics and faced much persecution but pleaded with Maurice for help in this area. We'd already made a promise to God that if asked to teach and not preach we'd go wherever we were invited in the world, so gave him our word that we would go.

Now ministering to people in the Third World was not what we had envisaged doing, it was certainly not something that appealed to either of us. Nothing really prepares you for the incessant heat and putrid stench of those dusty roads. You can't get away from it. But God was very kind as our host knew how to look after Westerners. We were provided with air-conditioned accommodation which was equipped with a fridge and a western toilet, and these were such a blessing. Samuel apologised for the fact he didn't have running hot water for our shower, but we stressed over and over again how grateful we were for the cold water which hit us every day ... and we truly meant it!

Judging By The Outward Appearance

When we come across people who are poor we tend to think that they are also uneducated and simple, but I saw for myself the tremendous hunger these people had for the word of God. They soaked up everything Maurice had to teach them. They copiously wrote pages of notes because they wanted

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to make sure they remembered these teachings so they could pass them on to their own congregations. It was wonderful to minister to these church leaders, and it's no wonder Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples to tell John that the poor had the gospel preached unto them. As we fellowshiped, shared meals with, and warmly hugged these 'untouchables', our hearts opened up and both Maurice and I learned to truly love and appreciate them. Their simplicity was refreshing.

God Cares For The Marginalised

God notices and cares about poor people even though others with supposedly better social status often ignore and abuse them. Samuel shared with us his longing for a Bible School where he could properly train his ministers and we could see for ourselves this was a real need. Although we had no money ourselves we felt we did have a voice so promised to support him in his venture. We came home to England with a burden for these Indian pastors.

Some time after our trip to India we were contacted by a man from Nigeria. We had received many invitations from that country asking us to preach the gospel and hold mass crusades but this was different. For some time, apparently, this Nigerian brother had been translating the bi-monthly

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newsletters we used to publish back then into local dialects, duplicating and sending them out to neighbouring countries at his own expense. Because of this he was asking if he could call himself 'Barratt Ministries Nigeria' and be our representative. We felt we could not permit this unless we had met him personally so made arrangements to pay him a visit. We said we wouldn't stay in a hotel or guest house, we would very much like him to accommodate us in his home. We didn't verbalize it, but really we wanted to vet him.

A Bumpy Ride

The plane landed in Lagos and Surakat rejoiced when he saw us at the airport. He and his family were so happy to have us in their car with them. What first hit us was the oppressive heat plus the roads – or should I say potholes connected with a bit of tarmac. The ride was terribly bumpy and took ages because we had to go slowly to avoid the suspension completely collapsing. But it was when we turned off the main roads and began to drive down the dirt tracks that my heart sank and I began to get apprehensive. I looked at the tiny shacks we passed to the right and left and wondered where on earth we were being taken. Surakat lived in the poor district so that he could help those with needs. He

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actually had a good job and could live in a nice area, but this is what he felt Christianity was about, so he was putting his faith into practice.

Thank God, A Western Toilet!

I thanked God from the bottom of my heart when we arrived at his home for he lived in a brick building which had a western toilet. There was no running water, we had to fill the tank every time we wanted to flush the loo, but we didn't have to find a hole somewhere outside. What a blessing! Surakat gave Maurice and I his family bed and he and his family slept on the floor in the living area.

The house was furnished with worn out furniture and a thin carpet which had been given to them before being thrown out by the people Surakat worked for. He even had a fridge and an overhead fan, but as their share of electricity was only one or two hours per day due to 'power sharing' we didn't manage to enjoy the benefit of these luxuries very much. When the electricity went off the main room was lit by a single torch bulb which had been rigged up to a tiny battery, and because our friends were black all we could see was the whites of their eyes and their teeth when they smiled. When we moved to other rooms we had to take a torch with us. Yet Surakat and his family felt so blessed because God

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had given to them things that others around them didn't have, and they did what they could to relieve the suffering of their neighbours by giving them food and other aids.

What we hadn't been aware of was that Surakat had been really glad of this opportunity to host us as he had wanted to see if we lived what we preached ... he'd wanted to vet us! It was good to hear that we'd passed the test. Nike, Surakat's wife, even went so far as to say that we'd been far less trouble than her own family, and that was praise indeed.

Christian Persecution

As Surakat was a police detective, a year prior to our visit he'd been sent to investigate some riots which had taken place in Kaduna, which is in the north of Nigeria. There had been some terrible tragedies when militant Muslims had persecuted Christians. Churches had been destroyed and many pastors and Believers had been killed or badly mutilated. A youth choir had been practicing in one of the church buildings when the Muslims had locked the doors and set fire to the place. They had all been burned alive. Surakat saw the results of the massacre and had been burdened to help the children who had seen their parents butchered. As it happened, we had already seen video footage of what had taken

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place because a missionary had asked us to help him make a film of this actual incident, so we had a keen interest. Surakat had a strong desire to build an orphanage in Lagos for these traumatised children where it was safe from Muslim persecution and we decided to help him realise his dream. We came home to England with another burden and got a friend to draw up plans for the proposed orphanage, put out the word that we needed financial aid, and the project got under way.

Uganda, Here We Come

The very next year we were approached by Frank, a young Pastor from Uganda, who wanted Maurice to teach discipleship to ministers from local churches. We again responded positively to the request and told Frank we would like to be accommodated in his home during our visit. Unfortunately, he said his house was too small, and nobody in his church had room either. He booked us into a modest bed and breakfast guest house and came each day, sometimes two to three hours before we were due to leave for the meetings, just so that he could listen to us and glean as much as possible whilst he had the opportunity. He was hungry, not only for spiritual food, but he was very thin and very hungry for natural food. I wasn't used to eating a breakfast so would pack up the things I could have

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eaten from the breakfast tables in serviettes and passed them on to him. He took these home to his family.

Compassion In Action

One day he invited us to his house to meet his family and share a meal with them. His wife, Stella, was pregnant with her first child as they'd only been married eighteenth months and was cooking our food out on the tiny porch using a little camping stove. She didn't have a kitchen, indeed she didn't have a lot of things! Frank's house comprised just two rooms, the lounge and bedroom. No bathroom, toilet, or kitchen, but he felt very blessed indeed because the house was made of brick which meant that it was watertight in the rainy season, and rat free.

We sat on the sofa in his lounge and his wife brought our food, then a little group of black children gathered around staring at us as we began to eat. I thought these were children from the neighbourhood who had been inquisitive and come in to look at our white faces as they'd never seen Westerners before, but I was amazed to learn that all these children lived with Frank. His wife had taken them under her wing and was already supporting them before she was married, so now Frank had inherited them when he took on his new wife. He had taken in ten orphans as their parents had either

died from AIDS or were too poor to feed them. I was astounded! “Where do they all sleep?” I asked. He just moved his hands round in a gesture to say, “Anywhere!” They weren’t particular. Wherever there was space, that's where they slept.

We Knew We Had To Help

This was so new to me. In the West we give to the poor from our excess, but here they were helping the poor because they had experienced poverty themselves and knew what it was like. Frank was so thin. Everyone knew Pastors were amongst the poorest of the poor and didn’t earn much money, yet his heart couldn’t refuse to help when asked even though he was in such a desperate situation himself. Maurice and I knew we had to get involved. We had no money of our own as we also were in the ministry, but we had friends, and a voice, and opportunities to make our voice heard. We never ask for money for our own ministry even though we have many needs ourselves, but we promised Frank that we would do what we could to help and God enabled us to raise the funds to build him a temporary half way house which was twice as big as the house we visited. We then began to build an orphanage right next door to the half way house. We don't even own the house we live in but, a need was staring us in the face and we couldn't ignore it. **It became a call.**

We Are Hardened In The West

Some years ago I was talking with a policewoman who shared with me some of the every day problems she had to deal with in her job as she 'walked the beat'. She was telling me how she listened to some very tragic stories and witnessed some very awful things, but at the end of the day she could put it all behind her, and when she left the Police Station she also left the worries of the day behind her. They were professional worries, not personal ones.

Often we can become hard to the heart cries of other people. Seeing so many desperate needs on the television has in fact desensitised us to the horrors of what they experience because they are just shadows on a screen which we can shut off by pressing a button – they are not really our concern. Surakat could have felt the same way about the children up in Kaduna. Frank could have felt the same way about the orphaned children left to fend for themselves on the streets. But somehow God had given them a revelation of the needs of others which ended up as a 'call' for help. If your heart is open you can guarantee that God will fill it ... often to overflowing. It can be very painful sharing someone else's problem, but 'a problem shared is a problem halved', and your concern could be the means of lightening someone else's very heavy load.

When The Need Becomes Personal, It's A Call

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; but you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what does it profit?

James 2:15-16

What Good Is That?

But whosoever has this world's good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:17-18

And here's a really serious exhortation to be more considerate and unselfish towards others, because it's going to matter very much to us, personally, when Jesus returns to judge the church;

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats:

When The Need Becomes Personal, It's A Call

and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? or thirsty, and gave you drink? When saw we you a stranger, and took you in? or naked, and clothed you? Or when saw we you sick, or in prison, and came unto you?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and you gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and you took me not in: naked, and you clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and you visited me not.

When The Need Becomes Personal, It's A Call

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto you?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Matthew 25:31-46

Finally, be you all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called, that you should inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:8-9

Yes, there's a blessing to be inherited when you have compassion towards others worse off than yourself. Particularly towards your brothers and sisters who are fellow Believers. Don't rob yourself of a blessing by being callous and hardhearted. God is no man's debtor, and when Jesus returns you will certainly receive your reward.

Chapter nine

Silence

The Bible states:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.'

Why? ...

That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished (or equipped) unto all good works.

2 Timothy 3:16

If we're open we can learn so much from other people's experiences. And there's usually an

underlying reason for people's behaviour. Have you ever wondered why David's son Absalom ended up killing his brother? A very sad situation arose in the household of King David. He had eight wives and many children, some even owning their own houses. Absalom, the son of David, had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and Amnon, also the son of David to another of his wives, loved her so much he was actually love sick and couldn't eat.

A Cunning Cousin

Amnon's cousin Jonadab was his best friend and he advised him to ask his father David to allow Tamar to come to his house so he could watch her cooking food for him as it might encourage him to eat. David agreed to this of course, so Tamar willingly complied. But when she'd cooked the food for Amnon he told all his men servants to leave, then he asked Tamar to bring the food to him in his bedroom. She did as asked, but because he was besotted with her he then took advantage of the situation begging her to come and lie with him. She resisted telling him to speak to their father as David wouldn't withhold her from him if he loved her so much. But the opportunity of having her then and there was too much for Amnon, so because he was much stronger than she was he ended up forcefully raping her.

Everything changed immediately. The heart of Amnon turned and suddenly he hated her more passionately now than he'd loved her previously. Amnon told her to get out of his house. He even called in his men servants to throw her out and bolt the door after her. Tamar was distraught. She tore her garments and covering her head with ashes as she ran from his house in tears. She ran straight to her brother Absalom who did his best to comfort and care for her by taking her into his own house. The poor girl was desolate. This unexpected attack had both stunned and horrified her.

Silence Isn't Always Golden

David was told about what had taken place and was very angry, but from reading the account in the scriptures, it seems he did nothing about it. There was no reprimand or comeback for Amnon. After two full years Absalom was so enraged at this total lack of justice on David's part that he took matters into his own hands to get revenge on Amnon. During a sheep shearing feast, to which Absalom invited all David's sons, he gave his servants a pep talk on courage and bravery, commanding them to wait until Amnon was tipsy and then kill him. They did just that.

Once the king's other sons saw what had happened they feared for their own lives and fled.

Absalom fled too, but he fled to his grandfather in Geshur. David knew and understood in his heart why Absalom had killed his brother and the Bible records that the soul of King David longed to go after Absalom. But he never did, there was silence.

David's Change Of Heart

After another three years Joab could see how David longed for his son and thought of a way to mend the breach between them. David consented to Joab's request and Absalom was allowed to return back to his own house. But David wouldn't meet with him personally. Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem and still he wasn't permitted to see his father's face.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

Colossians 3:21

Have you any idea what silence does, especially in families? When I was 16 I left home, I couldn't

wait to get out of my dysfunctional 'Christian' household. I moved into a flat but would occasionally return to visit with the family. My mother in particular was very hostile towards me and it was very rare that I would come away from a visit without having some kind of heated argument that made me wish I'd never bothered to go round at all. But the problem was we attended the same church. I led the singing from the platform as I was the church organist, and Mum and Dad would sit on the back row with some of their friends. Mum would glare at me with steely eyes. I'd feel the daggers she was mentally throwing but she refused to speak or have any contact with me. She and her 'very godly' friends had ganged up to totally ignore me and made Dad follow suit.

Wall Of Silence

On many occasions I tried to penetrate that awful wall of silent hostility because I was trying hard to be a real Christian, and Jesus had only given us one commandment when he said, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." Wow, that's such a hard commandment to obey when it's one sided! And whilst I was trying to obey Jesus he was changing my heart towards my parents. I don't know how he did it but he gave me

a soft heart of love towards them which made their silence all the more painful.

No Communication

As well as being the church organist I was also in the church music band with five guys. The wife of one of the guys in the band shared in her testimony that she had never heard her parents speak to each other! Although she and her parents lived together in the same house, she never once heard any verbal communication between her mother or father. They were not dumb, or deaf, and had no problem speaking to her or other people, but if they did need to communicate with each other they would leave notes or ask their daughter to tell the other parent such and such a thing, but they adamantly refused to talk to one another. They were living in a hell of their own making.

When I was around 30 years old I worked in a property development company which had just set up a branch in Manchester. Staff were recruited and we all got shunted around into various permanent positions as our capabilities became more obvious and I landed the top female secretarial job available. I'd been working for God full time for seven years and could hardly believe how he had given me this job after being out of circuit for so long as recruiters

were always looking for people with experience, and I'd had none as I'd been out on the mission field and worked for the church.

The secretary who'd been sent with the general manager to set up this branch saw God's favour on me and didn't like it one bit. She made snide and cruel remarks at any opportunity. I'd been getting on very well with everyone in the offices until she started feeding them with her nasty suggestions of how I appeared to be so innocent but inwardly I was very devious. I don't know how she did it but she managed to get the whole firm, except my boss and her own boss (who was the general manager) to totally blank me and behave as though I didn't exist. They would laugh, and joke, and talk to one another right across me, and if they did need to communicate with me they'd leave notes on my desk.

Bewildered

This went on for weeks and it was truly stressful. I knew leaving wasn't an option as God had put me in the job, but I was bewildered as I didn't know what I'd done to bring it on. Their silence drove me to secret tears and I begged God to sort the situation out. He eventually did, but silence is a very cruel and effective torture.

My husband and I try to live our lifestyles based on the sermon on the mount, and one of the Beatitudes is 'Blessed are the peacemaker, for they shall be called the children of God.' Being a peacemaker is very different to being a peacekeeper. To be a peacekeeper you'll do anything for a quiet life, but being a peacemaker means you have to get your hands dirty for you can't make peace without encountering conflict.

Circumstances Changed

Once my boss became aware of the stress I was under, and fearing that their nastiness could cause me to leave the firm, he took matters into his own hands by giving all the other members of staff a piece of his mind, then he instructed a couple of labourers to remove my desk from the main office where it was situated and place it in his own office. This shocked everyone – especially me, but things changed for the better dramatically after that, and eventually the troublemaker left. If there's a problem it needs dealing with, it won't just go away!

When I first got married I still had a lot of baggage from my past to deal with. Consequently, if Maurice did anything to upset me I would just go silent and ignore him until I'd felt he'd suffered enough, then

would let him talk me round. But this could go on for days as I was very experienced in this type of behaviour. Good old Maurice wouldn't put up with it though. He'd follow me around the house and corner me to sort our problem out. It used to drive me crackers! I hated feeling trapped. Sometimes I'd go hysterical. But, all credit to Maurice, he stuck with it and wouldn't let me off the hook until it was dealt with. I'd scream, I'd cry, I'd say sorry just to get him off my back; or we'd pray and ask God to help us, but if he detected I was just saying sorry, or praying, without actually meaning it he'd have none of it.

Maurice Wore Me Down

Sometimes our battles went on till three or four o'clock in the morning, and I'd be dog tired, but eventually I submitted. You have no idea what my husband had to cope with. He was never violent with me, even though at times I pushed him to his limit, but he trained me. So, because I didn't want the all night sessions to carry on, I eventually learned to break the pattern of sulking and going silent.

In previous chapters of my books I've spoken about the disobedience of Saul and how his rebellion and stubbornness caused God to repent that he'd ever made him king of Israel in the first place. Because Saul had rejected the word of God, God rejected

Saul from being king. But things got worse when God chose Saul's replacement for when Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David to be the next king in the midst of his brethren, the **Spirit of the Lord** came upon David from that day forward; but the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. God will not inhabit the same house as Satan. Saul was in a very bad place spiritually. He never saw Samuel again so not only did he have no access to God, he was now tormented with devils. If you think it's hurtful when people stop speaking to you, it's nothing compared to how hurt you can be when God ignores you.

Saul Was Afraid

In 1 Samuel 28:3 we read that Samuel was dead, and buried, and Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land. But now he found himself surrounded by the Philistine armies, and when Saul saw the host of the Philistines he was afraid and his heart greatly trembled, but he had nobody to give him godly counsel.

And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

1 Samuel 28:6

Because God would not speak to Saul he ended up seeking help from a witch and signing his own death warrant, for the very next day he was a dead man and the ark of the covenant was stolen from Israel. Silence is not quiet at all, it's explosive. Don't be surprised what happens if you provoke people in this way.

Things left unresolved will fester and eventually erupt. And when the lid blows it can cause irreparable damage. A word of advice. We all get a little angry at times, but anger is only a sin if you allow it to remain in your heart and let it grow. You must get rid of anger. Either swallow it and learn to longsuffer and forgive; or have it out with the person you're angry with, but do it with the desire to reconcile your differences and make peace. Paul says:

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

Ephesians 4:26

He also says:

You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

1 Thessalonians 5:5

Going to sleep with anger in your heart is just giving the devil time to bed it in so it can take root. So, let's have nothing to do with the devil. Let's learn to obey Jesus's commandment to love one another.

Chapter Ten

Wine Cheers God And Man

My husband really enjoys gardening and even though he's a very busy man he manages his time so that he can have an array of colourful flowers in the grounds all around our house. I like to look at the flowers but gardening has never been of any interest to me.

However, I do have a fascination for fruit trees and bushes, and over the years I've managed to get my husband to plant a number of fruit trees, many of which I've bought myself, because I get a real kick out of seeing them laden with fruit. We have a fig tree, a very young plum tree (which actually produced eight plums last year), a pear tree (which

hasn't produced anything much since we planted it about nine years ago), we have some young blackberry bushes, and two apple trees which are well established now. To be honest the two apple trees alone keep me busy when the fruit ripens as the older tree produces so many apples I can't keep up with the chopping, juicing, and freezing.

New Fruits

But one year a young woman who fellowshipped with us brought me some tomato, sweet pea, and leek plants in little pots so that I could grow my own vegetables. My husband re-potted them after a couple of weeks into three garden boxes he specially made for me to grow on our patio he's just built at the front of our house, and told me these were my responsibility, I had to look after them.

Well every day, during the glorious summer sunshine which we all enjoy here in the UK, I was out there watering my little plants. I'm afraid I lost the sweet peas, they just withered up after the transplant, but I continued caring for the others. I saw beautiful foliage and even flowers appear on the tomato plants which were a great encouragement as I'd never actually had success with any plants before. The rains helped me by keeping them well watered. But how amazed I was when the

little green tomatoes appeared where each of the flowers had been. I was in awe as I watched them each day growing in their little clusters. I even started talking to them telling them how clever and beautiful they were, and what a blessing they were to me. But when the little green tomatoes changed colour and became little bright red cherry tomatoes, which when I picked and ate tasted so good, it filled me with real joy and satisfaction. We can learn so much if we observe and take note of God's creation.

Learning From Life

I personally learned such much about how God deals with his children by watching my own children. Parents are so indulgent. We give of ourselves selflessly to protect, nourish, and care for our own offspring. We do absolutely everything for them from wiping their bottoms when they've messed up, to having endless sleepless nights when they're sick or in pain, because they're so helpless. We support them, on average, for around 20 years before they can take full responsibility for themselves or even think about marriage and having a family of their own.

But by watching fruit grow on the trees, and particularly on these little tomato plants, I learned

so much more about how God feels about his valued and very precious servants. Yes, when we were reconciled to God by the precious sacrifice Jesus made we were adopted into God's family and allowed to become children of God. God's so indulgent with his children. Just as a father pities his child, God does everything for us knowing we are helpless and can do nothing for ourselves. But his great desire is that instead of him being of use to us, we become of use to him.

Like Father – Like Son

Up until nearly 100 years ago children would learn their parents' trade and follow on in their footsteps. Jesus had this mind-set too as when he went missing only to be found three days later in the temple at the age of twelve he asked his parents, "Didn't you realise I have to be about my father's business?" – meaning his Heavenly father of course. And as far as his earthly father Joseph was concerned, well Jesus followed on in the family business and was a carpenter until the age of thirty.

Ultimately, God is looking for profit. I was really disappointed to lose the sweet peas as all my efforts had been wasted, but it was a completely different story with the tomatoes. Seeing them bear fruit encouraged me to continue growing more the next year.

The True Vine

You know, God is a gardener. John 15 starts off by Jesus saying that he is the true vine, his father is the husbandman, and we are the branches. I can see things a little clearer now because I've experienced in a small way what it's like to tend, not flowers, but vegetables. I gave them quite a bit of attention, like weeding the garden boxes when I spotted weeds growing beside my plants. I removed dead branches and leaves which robbed my plants of sunlight and made sure the stems were supported by tying them to sticks so the weight of the fruit didn't cause them to snap. And I did all this just so that my little plants had every possible opportunity to produce good, healthy, tasty fruit. If I did all this as a beginner, what is God like? He's the master gardener. Jesus said:

Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches: he that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

John 15:2-5

Plants Don't Have Free Will

My little tomato plants didn't have free will. They grew where I planted them. If they didn't like the soil, or the environment where I placed them, there was nothing they could do about it as they were rooted and fixed. It's possible, because I'm only a beginner, that I may not have placed them in the ideal spot, or even used the best soil, but I was tending them, and keeping an eye on them, because I was after a crop of tomatoes. The roots, the stems, and even the branches were of no real interest to me. I was tending them only because I wanted them to be healthy to yield good fruit.

In this passage of scripture Jesus points out what's going on spiritually. He's saying that he's the vine tree and we are the branches. But unlike natural plants we each have free will. Jesus said we're clean through the words which he's spoken unto us. He's given so many instructions and commandments for us to follow, the main one being to love one another the same way he's loved

us. We can be receptive to these instructions and allow the attitude of Christ (the spiritual sap from the vine) to flow through us as branches attached to the vine, or we can close our ears and block the flow which will eventually dry us up so that we are not only fruitless, but will die.

Let me explain to you how God views the vine.

Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken from a vine to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? (He's meaning to use it as a hook or peg.) Behold, the wood is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it suitable for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was fit for no work: how much less shall it be fit for any work, when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

Ezekiel 15:2-5

Jesus said he was the true vine tree yet this passage from Ezekiel says that the wood from the vine is pathetically useless and fit for nothing other than starting fires, you can't even make a pencil out of it. Jesus came in flesh and blood, being no different

from us other than he was absolutely filled with the spirit of God. The Bible says there is no good thing in the flesh. But that's exactly God's choice because Paul says:

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God's chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and God's chosen the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, and things which are regarded as nothing, to bring to nothing things that are:

1 Corinthians 1:27-28

God, The Ultimate Gardener

But why is this God's choice? It's so that no flesh should glory in his presence, and the gardener gets the praise for any fruit that appears on the vine. God is the ultimate gardener and knows exactly the ideal circumstances not only for his vine to grow, but also to produce luscious, healthy, delicious grapes.

So what are the grapes, what's the fruit God is looking for? Well it's certainly not winning more souls, that would be like adding more branches not fruit to the vine tree. No it's something that bulges and bursts out of the branches themselves when the

life giving sap flows through them freely. Very often you can't tell the type of tree by the leaves alone, you need to wait for the fruit to appear. You can call yourself a Believer in Christ all day long but words are just leaves. Jesus said the tree is known by it's fruit. If you have the life of Christ flowing through your spirit you'll show Christ's character which is ... love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22).

In Judges we read that wine, the fruit of the vine, cheers God and man.

Then said the trees unto the vine, Come, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheers God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Judges 9:12-13

So make no mistake, it's the grapes, the fruit, he's after.

Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law he meditates day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted

by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper.

Psalms 1:1-3

If you love God make friends of your own kind by mixing with godly people. You won't find a vine with just one lone branch on it, there are many branches on a vine, so you need to be in constant fellowship with un-worldly, spiritually minded, God fearing Believers who love God with all their hearts and obey his commandments, the first and foremost being that we love one another as Christ has loved us.

Love Where You Have Been Planted

Accept God's skills at husbandry. Learn to love the environment where you've been planted, love whom you've been planted alongside, be thankful for the place on the vine where you've been positioned. Yield yourself to God's constant pruning and attention. What a privileged people we are to be grafted onto the vine and given an opportunity to cheer God's heart by showing the character of Christ displayed in weak vessels. Remember... when you were grafted onto the vine you were hand picked for this very purpose. Jesus said:

You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:

John 15:16

O that we could all give God what he's looking for and cheer his heart. Let's bless him by giving him back a little in appreciation for all he's done for us.

Chapter Eleven

Doing The Right Thing With The Wrong Motive

We're all supposed to do things which are right and proper, but unless it's done with a pure motive, as far as God is concerned, it's not good enough. Never underestimate God – he sees all. We can delude others, some of the time, but God is our witness **all** of the time.

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto **unfeigned love of the brethren**, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently:

1 Peter 1:22

Unfeigned love of the brethren! Have you ever wondered what that terminology means?

Some years ago God showed me a vision. In the vision I was sitting in a small fishing boat on a moat surrounding a castle and wanted to get through a portcullis in the water because on the other side there was a huge lake full of fish. Guarding the portcullis gate was an angel and as I approached he asked what my business was. I told him I was a fisherman by trade and needed to get through to catch fish. He just looked at me and said he couldn't open the gate because that wasn't a good enough reason. I was quite surprised by this response so I sat and thought for a while.

"Please let me through. There are hungry people and I need to catch fish so that I can feed them."

Again he just looked at me shaking his head, "I can't open the gate, your reason's not good enough!" I sat there stunned. I couldn't for the life of me understand his attitude. Why wouldn't he let me through?

As I sat there looking through the portcullis wondering what to say next I saw an oil slick begin to spread on the surface of the water ...

"Quick, quick, there's oil on the water. I need to get through. The fish are going to die, I need to rescue them!"

The angel looked through the gate and seeing the oil immediately sprung into action lifting the gate for

me to get through shouting, "I'm getting in the boat with you, I'm coming to help!"

I Didn't Know Why I Was There

Very often what we're doing is not necessarily wrong but the reason why we are doing is of concern to God. When God first sent my husband and I to third world countries I didn't really know what I was doing there. We saw the way the poor people were living but had very little understanding of their culture or the every day things they had to cope with, we just did our job and shared what God had put on our hearts to say. Our worlds were so different. I thought I'd be filled with pity and compassion, but contrary to this I was filled with envy for the community spirit and family life they all seemed to enjoy. They were so poor that they had nothing in their houses to stay in for so hung around outdoors working, chatting and laughing, whilst the children ran around squealing with laughter playing together. It took me back to the time I was growing up when there were no such things as televisions, computers, or mobile phones and I realised they had what we'd lost long ago.

For a few years I did my duty accompanying my husband. I didn't enjoy going to these countries, the heat was uncomfortable and the food strange, and we

never knew what our accommodation would be like. Very often we'd have no air conditioning, mosquito nets, or a western toilet; it was really difficult to cope with. In both India and Africa the women could see how I struggled. They watched every move I made and couldn't hide either their surprise or smiles when they saw me fanning myself as the sweat ran down my face while they were wrapped up in shawls holding their babies in blankets, and they'd often praise me for having such love that we would come and visit them. But to be honest I didn't really feel much love, I couldn't wait to get back to my own climate. During my very first month long trip to Barbados I was actually dreaming of snow!

Forming Real Relationships

Thank God I had the opportunity to revisit the same people over and over again. They say familiarity breeds contempt, but I have also found that the more familiar you get with people the more you can learn to appreciate them. Once I got over my shyness at not knowing either their language or culture, and tried to hold conversations with those who could speak a little English, I began to form real relationships. I got to know people in the congregations by name and listened to their stories of how God had rescued them. I soon forgot my own discomfort and when

I heard what an encouragement we were to these people because of the things we taught them my heart melted and I grew to love them as brothers and sisters.

A Willing Sacrifice

Duty stinks to God. If you're only serving God out of duty then you might as well forget it because no sweet smelling savour will ever come from that. When people in Bible days brought offerings and sacrifices to God they were meant to be willing sacrifices from a willing heart. If they were offered begrudgingly they were not acceptable to God.

We have a little maxim ... **if you can't change your circumstances, change your attitude.** I believe God deliberately places us in difficult circumstances to see how we'll react. It's easy to talk the Christian jargon, but can we live it? That's the question. Talk's cheap.

Jesus couldn't tolerate hypocrisy and openly criticised the religious leaders for their shameless behaviour. He instructed his disciples to act differently:

And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the

corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward (they had already received their reward because people praised them thinking they were great).

Matthew 6:5

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi.

Matthew 23:5

Every one of us can very easily appear to men to be holy and separate, doing all the right things outwardly yet still be hiding the true motives of our hearts.

Have you ever held a birthday party for one of your children and invited kids you don't particularly like to attend, or even the children of parents you don't particularly like? This may look like a really kind and generous thing to do, but if your intention is just to swell the numbers to make your child appear more popular, and receive more presents, then this is pretty obnoxious. You are hypocritically welcoming them into your company if you, or your child, can't tolerate

them normally, you're just using them because they'll be coming laden with gifts.

I happen to know mothers and children who have done this.

Use hospitality one to another without
grudging.

1 Peter 4:9

Wrong Motives

There are pastors who preach the gospel and do their utmost to convert the lost only to swell their numbers. I've heard them share with fellow ministers that with a few more members tithing regularly they'd soon be able to afford the new extension to the church building. Preaching the gospel is good, getting sinners converted is admirable, but focussing on their new extension is abysmal and unacceptable to God.

Lay aside all malice, and all guile, and
hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.

1 Peter 2:1

I live right next door to a private hospital, in fact we share the same driveway. We made an agreement with them some years back to use our driveway to enter and their driveway to exit the

premises, and this works fine during the week. But on the weekends the hospital is not in use so, to my way of thinking, there was no reason to use this one-way system and I would just drive out using our driveway. The problem was that Maurice saw me do it a couple of times and told me off, saying I had to obey the rules. I thought it was stupid but Maurice said it's what I had to do so I obeyed. But whenever he was away book writing I'd revert to what I'd always done. Then one day as I got back into the car after closing our gates behind me ready to set off down the driveway on my journey I felt a pang of conviction because we're always preaching what Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount, and it came back to bite me.

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

Jesus said:

You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: (in other words, give back as good as you get) but I say unto you, That you resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite you on your right

cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloke also. And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two miles.

Matthew 5:38

Real Christianity

Having your face slapped and not retaliating is duty, offering the other cheek is more than duty. Going one mile is duty, offering to go an extra mile is more than duty. Having your coat taken as payment when sued at court is duty, offering your opponent your cloak as well is more than duty. Jesus said **if you love me** keep my commandments. You can prove whether you love Jesus or not.

Well I sat in the car ready to drive off the wrong way and I could hear Maurice in my head telling me to drive the right way, and in that moment I had a little conversation with myself.

"Do you love Maurice?" Well the answer to that was yes, of course.

"Well, in that case why are you being rebellious and finding it irksome to do what he asks?"

"Yes, I do love Maurice, and I do love you Lord. And to prove I love Maurice I'm going to obey him and do what he asks because I want to please him".

Then I drove off with a lovely warm feeling in my heart knowing I'd overcome another rebellious habit. Ha ha, we're full of them!

God Uses Bad People

We have to think seriously about why we are doing what we are doing because the root of everything is important to God. He can get sinners and evil people to do good things – you only have to watch movies like ‘Schindler’s List’ to know that. Here was a covetous man, thankful that war had broken out, bent on making money out of other people’s misfortunes. He couldn’t care less about the Jews. He wanted the cheapest work force possible so rather than employ Polish people he took on the Jews simply because he didn’t have to pay them. In German eyes they were of less importance than rats. It was God who moved Schindler to do what he did when he saved hundreds of Jews from the gas chambers. It was God who gave Schindler popularity with the Germans so that he could purchase many people with the money he had made in business. It was God who changed Schindler’s attitude towards the very people he had once despised. As soon as the war had ended Schindler’s God-given mandate was done and he reverted back to what he was. His marriage failed and so did his business. But God

had done what he wanted through him.

If you only want to be the donkey that God uses because the people God is trying to speak to just refuse to hear, and there is nobody else around at the time, then God will put you to service. But if you want to be regarded as someone he can trust to do specific tasks at specific times, and for what we have done to be of value – storing treasure in heaven – then it's important to deal with our attitudes and do whatever we are doing with the right motives, because God takes no notice of words, he sees right to the heart of the matter.

Chapter Twelve

Salt In Society

From my earliest recollections I can remember my mother pointing out to me that if I wanted to be on the television and get on in the world of show business I would either have to expose my body or sleep with the directors. This sounds like a sweeping statement, but the more I consider it, the more I realise she was absolutely right. For a girl, at least! As I was quite plump as a young girl, and had a fear of being taken advantage of, I decided it would be better to explore other ways of earning a living. But, if you have any degree of talent or a bit of exhibitionism the stage holds a tremendous attraction. I was used to performing vocal and instrumental solos before audiences in school concerts and the applause, even to my young ears, was heady. I felt good at

something, of value, accepted, and this gave me a glowing feeling of self-worth.

Progressing

Not being content to just sing in the bath it was a natural progression for me to move from school circles to church circles. I had a West Indian friend who also had a good voice so we rehearsed hymns together singing in two-part harmony. When I was a kid churches were not as sophisticated as they are today and pastors did all they could to encourage their young members to find a niche. My pastor regularly asked my friend and I to sing during our regular services, and after hearing us, pastors from other churches would also invite us to sing for their congregations. Sometimes we would even be booked to sing at conventions, and now we really felt we'd hit the big time because we were given a ministry gift afterwards.

Our style was very primitive. We would ask the pianist, whether they could play or not, to accompany us whilst we sang. After just one brief run through before the meeting we'd perform without microphones to an accommodating audience who beamed smiles at us. They all wanted to encourage us. And they did. But when I reached sixteen years of age I was asked to join a group. This was totally

different. We all played various instruments and each song was treated in a completely individual way. We practised our material for weeks before performing anything publicly. We'd work on introductions, endings, vocal backing, and only when it was as good as we could get it would we bring it to the church. We became very proficient and were regularly booked by other ministers for services and conventions. After returning from our tour in Holland where we performed in some of the Dutch churches, we felt it was now time to expose ourselves and begin playing in the world.

Crossover Music

This was of course the ultimate. We would be 'Salt in Society', getting work in pubs and clubs singing a few worldly songs and mixing in some Christian songs, this way we could get to witness in a way that would be acceptable. How else were we to affect the world? If people wouldn't come into the churches to hear us, then we would take our music out to them. We talked our plan over and over together but couldn't feel right about it. We booked ourselves into recording studios, made albums, and began to get bookings for concerts, all the time waiting for the right person to come along to spot our talent and put us in the big league. We

did everything we could to be professional in our performance, from the clothes we wore to the way we held our mics. We advertised ourselves, but still God kept us hidden.

I Was Uncomfortable

I do remember one occasion when we were asked to provide the music for the 21st birthday party of a friend of ours who was both a professional model and 'Bond Girl' when Roger Moore was 007. She wanted to sing and asked if I would do a duet with her saying she would buy me a dress identical to the one she would be wearing so that we would look really good singing together. But after seeing what she had in mind, and realising I was going to try to be a 'witness' at this worldly do, I declined her offer of the dress. We sang all the right songs as far as Christianity was concerned, then had a giggle accompanying our friend with her song, 'Big Spender', and it was only after this song that I realised what we were doing. We were just entertainers. We lapped up the applause of course, and the men tried to flirt with me. The guys in the group ate the food and drank the alcohol and, except for the fact that we went to church, we were no different from any of these other worldly people.

On another occasion I was asked to do some session singing with an internationally famous hairdresser. He was putting on a very elaborate fashion show in London but wanted to make it even more unique by incorporating himself singing a love song. In his very seductive Swiss accent he sang the part of the male solo whilst I sang the female solo. He did his part very convincingly whilst I tried my professional best to get into the song, but knowing that he was a self-professing homosexual made me feel unbelievably uncomfortable. I blushed. He could see the discomfort I was in and revelled in it, becoming even more teasing with his manner whilst looking right into my eyes as he sang. I think that was one of the worst jobs I ever took on, it made everything to do with show business and fame filthy, corrupt, and false to me.

Selective Grooming

Many years ago I happened to see a television interview of Sheena Easton. The programme was very educational because it traced how she'd actually become famous. She'd started out as a pub and then club singer, was noticed by a talent spotter who then offered her a record contract, but in order to be promoted she had to succumb to quite a number of changes, both physically and musically.

She'd started out as just an ordinary, good looking girl, but they cut and restyled her hair, gave her a complete makeover, and changed her style of dress. She looked a completely different person. Then they chose the songs she was to sing. The effect was quite astonishing, she didn't look or sound anything like the same girl. But it made me realise that fame comes as a cost. You may think you can become famous and carry on singing for and about God, but show business is all about making money. 'If it don't sell, you can't do it!' U2 is a classic example of what happens to Christians who try to break through into the world of show business with the idea that you can be a witness. They have all ended up in the occult, preaching for Satan instead of the one they once called their Lord Jesus Christ.

It Left Me Cold

During one period of my life I attended concerts to watch famous artists perform. I have seen some extremely gifted stars and admired their talents. But all these people were displaying themselves and showing what they could do. In some cases, performers were so technical, and could do so many clever things with either their instruments or their voices, that I was left cold. There was no emotion in what they did. Other times the artiste would

manipulate the audience so we were all swept away on a wave of emotion which would end up with the crowd on their feet giving rapturous applause. Stephan Grapelli was one such performer who, after playing his jazz violin, had the crowd on their feet in adulation. The applause was long and thunderous. Nobody worried about his life style or character because it was his talent he was displaying and the audience both recognised and appreciated it. I felt totally detached as I watched him and his male backing musicians take their bows as wave after wave of applause went up. I thought to myself, 'He's acting like a god. Only Jehovah should receive this kind of praise'.

Loving The Praise Of Men

We now have Christian superstars in the churches. People who want attention. People who love the praise of men and want personal glory for their God-given talents and gifts. I was going in that direction too but God allowed me to go through the fiery furnace to knock all desire for wealth and fame out of me. Churches have become the equivalent of religious clubs into which we bring both fashion and entertainment. If you want to know how much 'salt' the church is in society, just look at the churches which are attracting the biggest congregations and

you'll see plenty of 'society' in the so called 'salt'. We can't influence the world by becoming part of it. The two just don't mix. We have to leave the world, and the world has to leave us. We have to show a completely different life style. If what we do with our God-given talents and gifts doesn't bring the conviction of God upon those who observe us, then we are at best just entertainers who have lost our way. God is interested in changing people, not systems.

Being Salt

If you're salt you'll make some sort of difference wherever you are whether you're aware of it or not. When I was 25 I worked in an advertising agency. I actually loved that job. I suppose the whole ethos of advertising is to be creative and think of new ideas which will capture people's attention to sell products. Everyone who worked there was an extrovert. It didn't matter how bizarre your opinions were, whether personal or to do with the job, everything was valued and nobody was discriminated against. When I shared that I was a Christian and went to church nobody mocked me, but neither did it impress them, because there were others working there who were New Agers, or atheists, and one secretary in particular, named Hilary, had such a filthy mind that even these very

worldly blokes would blush at things she said. Before this job I'd worked in offices where there was much backstabbing and cattiness amongst the secretaries, but here you could be as crude and brutally honest as you liked and nobody batted an eyelid, it was all seen as expressing yourself.

It Changed Me

It was whilst I was working at the advertising agency that my pastor started preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Wow, did that teaching batter me! I'd been going to church my whole life feeling blessed at what God had done for me but was now faced with how I should be living for God and it devastated me. Up until that teaching I never realised how wicked my old nature was. I remember feeling absolutely crushed one Monday after hearing yet another of these sermons the day before. I really wanted to be Christlike but had so far to go. During the course of the day I needed to get something from Hilary so went to her office. She must have just made a mess of something on her typewriter as when I opened the door the air was blue with all the curses bellowing out of her mouth.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't realise it was you, Joanna. I wouldn't have spoken like that if I'd known it was you!"

I was really surprised and told her it wasn't a problem, she didn't need to apologise.

"Yes I do," she said. "You're holy!"

Her words stunned me and I looked at her trying to detect mockery in her eyes, but all I could see was genuine honesty in her face.

What Did She See In Me?

I practically ran out of her office to the ladies bathroom. Staring into the mirror I wondered what she had just seen in me. I burst into tears. I'd felt so hopeless that day, but she must have seen Jesus in me ... and he'd made this foul mouthed young woman embarrassed!

Very soon after this incident, a young lady in my office eventually came to the church after multiple invitations and got filled with the Holy Ghost before she'd even asked Jesus into her heart! Wow, the firm started buzzing. Without even an invitation Hilary asked if she could come to church with me. She came with her two cronies whom she was always with at work. She spread the word about the church in the agency and one of the bosses together with two more of the staff came. It was like a little revival and I began holding Bible studies and prayer meetings in the lunch breaks. I wasn't there long after these occurrences, God called me to full

time ministry, but my remaining days at the agency were incredibly exciting.

Salt Makes All The Difference

Don't underestimate salt. You don't need much of it to make a difference to any meal as you well know. All Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego did was remain standing when everybody else bowed – they didn't actually DO anything! All Daniel did was continue praying as he'd always done – his lifestyle didn't alter in any way. But look at the effect these men had on their society. If the lock down we all experienced a few years ago restricted you, or altered your habits, then you need to realise this world still has power over you. In my wildest imagination I just couldn't imagine either Jesus or his disciples wearing face masks and gloves, or not meeting with others and having fellowship. We need to beware of the things happening in the world today because Jesus said if salt loses it's saltiness, there's no way it can be seasoned again.

May God help us all.

Chapter Thirteen

Ahithophel - Grudges

Have you ever wondered how somebody you always thought loved you can turn to become savage and vindictive? The book of Proverbs says:

Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23

After holding a grudge and allowing it to fester in the heart anyone can turn. I was speaking to someone about a situation which occurred in King David's family where his son, Amnon, forcefully raped his daughter, Tamar, which resulted in Absalom, another son of David, murdering his

brother Amnon two years later to avenge his sister. Absalom then ran away to live with his grandfather whilst the dust settled. David knew and understood why Absalom had killed his brother and the Bible records that the soul of king David longed to go after Absalom. But he never did, there was silence. After three years Joab, the captain of David's army, could see how David longed for his son and thought of a way to mend the breach between them. David consented to Joab's request and Absalom was brought home to return back to his own house. But David wouldn't meet with him personally. Absalom was two full years in Jerusalem, and still didn't see his father's face.

Frustration

Absalom couldn't understand why David didn't want contact with him and his frustration was building up to boiling point. Why did he bring him back from living with his grandfather? He'd been happy there but was miserable in this present situation. Out of sheer desperation he decided to send a very effective message to Joab by setting his barley field on fire – it seems this was the only way he could get his attention. Of course, Joab came and demanded to know what possessed him to do such a thing. And Absalom said, "Why am I come from

Geshur? It had been good for me to have been there still: let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me." So Joab told David: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

Reconciliation At Last

At last the silence was broken and there was some communication between David and Absalom but the problem was that David had provoked Absalom to wrath by his injustice and the seven years of silence between them. Absalom had been both discouraged and offended by David's behaviour, and I can understand that. He must have been deeply hurt. But it had festered in his heart and he now harboured a grudge. The man Absalom had once loved was now the man he hated and, just like Amnon with Tamar, his heart had turned. He'd lost respect and wanted payback ...there is never a good enough reason for wanting payback

Jesus said it's impossible to not be offended in this life but woe to those who have caused the offence. David offended Absalom in ignorance, but Absalom knew exactly what he was doing when he conspired to dethrone David. In the book of Samuel we read that Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city are you? And he said, Your servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, your matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear you. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which had any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came near to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:1-6

Proverbs says that if you want friends you must show yourself to be friendly: and this is exactly how Absalom won the people. (Proverbs 18:24)

Absalom was 40 years old, it could even have been his birthday, and he asked David if he could

go to Hebron to pay a vow he owed to God as he'd made the promise that if God brought him back to Jerusalem then he would serve the Lord. It must have been like sweet music in the ears of David for one of his sons to say he wanted to serve the Lord. He sent him to Hebron in peace and with his blessing. But Absalom had already sent spies ahead of him whilst journeying there with 200 hand picked soldiers from Jerusalem, who knew nothing of his intentions, to let the tribes know that when the trumpet blew he was going to be crowned king in Hebron.

Conspiracy

Absalom sent for Ahithophel, his father's personal counsellor, who came and joined forces with him.

The conspiracy against David was strong because the people continually increased who were for Absalom. When David got wind of what was afoot he made everyone under his protection evacuate Jerusalem and just left ten concubines, to keep the house while he fled. This mighty king David was a broken man. He knew what Absalom was capable of if there was a battle. Like father – like son. And once he found out that Ahithophel was conspiring with Absalom he prayed his counsel would be turned to foolishness.

And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

2 Samuel 16:23

What an unexpected blessing for David when his friend Hushai came to meet him. He was truly distressed about what was happening and would have joined David on his journey but David said he'd be of more use to him if he offered his services to Absalom so that he could defeat any advice Ahithophel might give.

Bad Advice

Unfortunately, Absalom had already taken Ahithophel's advice to go into his father's concubines in the sight of everyone, assuring him David would abhor him, and Absalom's men would be strengthened. But the next time Ahithophel gave a plan of action, which would actually have destroyed David and wiped out his supporters, it was overruled because Hushai had seemingly come up with a better suggestion.

But actually God was intervening here. "For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent

that he might bring evil upon Absalom." Absalom led Israel out to war against David's men but there was a mighty slaughter of his conspirators. Absalom was trapped so rode his mule through the woods, and as the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, his head caught hold of the oak, and he was left hanging in the air by his thick hair. It didn't take Joab long to put an end to his life. Absalom received the treatment he'd intended for his father. But how wicked when a son can plot to kill his own father!

Resentment

How did things get so bad between them? Well, Absalom took offence because David didn't deal with his half brother Amnon after he'd forcefully raped his sister. He couldn't get rid of his anger and it festered and grew inside of him. And after seven years with no communication from David the offence had turned into hatred so now all he wanted was revenge. But what happened to Ahithophel?

And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died,

and was buried in the sepulchre of his Father.

2 Samuel 17:23

I can understand somewhat the situation between David and Absalom, but why did Ahithophel become so vindictive? He had been David's counsellor and his words were regarded as the oracles of God, as though they'd come from the very mouth of God! Why did Ahithophel turn and become David's enemy? Well here are two verses which shed a great deal of light on this:

And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

2 Samuel 11:3

Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,

2 Samuel 23:34

Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather! David had committed adultery with his granddaughter and murdered her husband to cover his tracks many years previously, and he'd never forgotten. This once very godly man had also borne a grudge

which had festered in his heart and it turned to such hatred that he wanted to kill David in revenge. Grudges are way too serious to hold on to, they eat you up. The Bible says don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Get rid of your offences, your grudges, before you do or say something stupid because they can destroy even the most godly among us. In any criminal investigation you will find that detectives always look for motives – those things which have been festering in the heart. Even they know that holding onto grudges and unforgiveness are root causes for murder, and they will dig and dig until they find those motives.

Matters Of The Heart

We all need to know what we're dealing with when it comes to matters of our heart so I'd just like to bring a few verses of scripture to your attention:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Jeremiah 17:9

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,

Fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

Matthew 15:18-19

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.

Mark 7:21

Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Hebrews 12:15

And finally ...

Keep your heart (protect it and keep it clean) with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23

Chapter Fourteen

Never Judge Someone Based On A Season

I've been thinking about how easy it is to jump to conclusions, and maybe it's because of some of the reactions I've noticed in people who haven't seen me for 30 or 40 years. They presume I'm the same person now as I was then, but we all grow up and very often move on, and it should certainly be that way with Believers as we should be getting more and more like Jesus.

And if any man thinks that he knows any thing, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

1 Corinthians 8:2

We cannot push our knowledge or convictions onto others as they may not have had the same revelation as us. We are all works in progress and God knows the stage we are at, that's why the verse following says:

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

1 Corinthians 8:3

We jump to conclusions concerning how others ought to behave because we have some knowledge, but somebody once said, 'A little learning is a dangerous thing', and I believe this to be so true. As parents, we often look at our children and wonder what or who they will be when they grow up. We might have dreams for their futures, but life has many twists and turns and we just have to wait to see how things unfold. We are all on a journey.

We Start At The Beginning

We never come into this world at our destination, we all have to start our journey from somewhere, so we should continually check ourselves and not jump to conclusions about others because we have no idea where they are on their journey, nor what or who they will become. We may feel very disappointed

with them at present but we should never judge anyone based on a season in their lives.

Who would have imagined the twists and turns that would take place in the life of Joseph? This poor unfortunate young man who was the apple of his father's eye experienced such hatred and rejection that his very spirit must have been crushed when he was torn away from all he knew and loved to be physically sold into slavery by his own brothers at the age of 17.

Attempted Rape

How does anyone survive an experience like that? There's no coming back from slavery. Joseph had no rights whatsoever and was kept alive only to fulfil his masters pleasure. After being falsely accused of attempted rape he was thrown into prison, yet even in this situation, because he feared and loved God, he served his captors to the best of his ability. To all intents and purposes he was dead to the world and the world was dead to him. A slave who'd been thrown into prison could only expect to rot there.

This was one season in his life – he was a prisoner. But while ever there is breath in a person's body there is always an opportunity for God to intervene. Who, in their wildest imagination, could have foreseen that one pronouncement from the very

Pharaoh of Egypt's mouth would alter Joseph's destiny from being a slave prisoner one moment to becoming the Prime Minister of Egypt the next – to whom everyone in the known world, excepting only the Pharaoh, would bow? But Joseph was not an exception. The Bible shows there were many who experienced exceptional transitions in their lives and we are to take note of them because it shows us how God can take the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.

He Was Despised

David was also rejected by his family and sent out into the field to look after his father's sheep. Even when Samuel, that mighty and feared prophet of God, invited all David's family to attend a feast in Bethlehem David wasn't notified about the event. They excluded him and left him in the field with the sheep.

David was despised by his family. To them he was good for nothing other than looking after the sheep and singing his little songs whilst playing his harp. They must have considered him to be too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. In their wildest imaginations not one member of David's family would have dreamed that the feast Samuel was calling was all about David when he would be

anointing him to be the next king! One season in David's life he was the singing shepherd – but the next season he was King of Israel.

What About Saul?

The New Testament gives some marvellous examples too. Just look at that zealot Saul who during one season of his life was breathing out fire and brimstone as he hunted down and slaughtered the early Christians without consideration as to whether they were male or female, young or old, and even convinced himself he was doing God a service. The Believers were terrified of him. Yet after being blinded by the dazzling brightness of Jesus on his way to Damascus he turns out to be the apostle who willingly puts his body on the line to suffer physical abuse more than all the others. One season he was persecuting the Christians – the next season he was showing us all how to suffer persecution and count it all joy for the crown that is set before us.

There are women also who have seen different seasons. Take Mary Magdalene for instance. One season she was a prostitute who was so messed up and entangled with sin and vice that she was even devil possessed. But after meeting Jesus she was radically transformed. This tormented woman

realised what true, pure love was and devoted her whole future to faithfully serving her Lord and master. One season she was just a piece of meat which any man used and abused – the next season, out of the vast number of disciples and followers, she was the very first person to whom the risen Jesus chose to reveal himself. O how Jesus must have been blessed by the thankfulness and love which oozed out of this forgiven woman's heart and spirit.

A Samaritan Woman

There was also another woman whom Jesus met and conversed with at a well. His disciples had gone off to buy food so whilst on his own with her he asked for a drink of well water. One season she was a flighty female who had already had five husbands and at that very moment was involved in a scandalous affair with yet another man – but the next season she had the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah all Israel had been waiting for and evangelised her city causing many to follow Jesus, preparing the way for his visit to her area.

The Bible is such a precious gift to us all from God.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

If we read it and get to learn how God works and deals with people then not only will we be less likely to judge, but we will be filled with hope because we'll realise it's not how we start the race that matters, it's how we finish. It's not only the Bible that contains these wonderful stories of transformation, I've witnessed many people in my own lifetime who have had massive turnarounds. I remember one man in particular. He was such a vicious little man that whilst in prison one time he got into a fight with a big guy over an ounce of tobacco and severely damaged him with a chisel.

Complete Change

One season he was in solitary confinement regarded as a gangster and a menace to society – the next season Jesus personally met him in that very cell and changed his life completely without any priest, or pastor, and he ended up working with the police to **break into premises and** rescue children who had been stolen for the sex trafficking trade.

I know many parents are worried sick about their children. What an age to be bringing children up in! What chance do young people have with all the debauchery that's on offer around them, and none of it is regarded as sin, but all classed as experience.

I know many young people who didn't actually go to university for an education, in truth they wanted to experience the lifestyle of unbridled drink, drugs, and sex outside of any parental control or restrictions. And even without the influence university modern music and the social media have hypnotised our kids into believing all the hype regarding living for pleasure and being free of responsibility.

The Prodigal Son

I think of the story Jesus told about the wealthy man who had two sons. The younger son was too impatient to wait for his father to die, he wanted his inheritance now! So, his father indulged him by giving him his portion of the inheritance and his freedom. Wow, the young man was like a dog with two tails. He left home and began to travel. Because he was throwing his money around he attracted many friends who enjoyed his parties with all the free food, drink, and prostitutes he provided. But when his money ran out his new friends abandoned

him and he was left destitute. He needed a job but had sunk so low that he could only find work looking after pigs and hunger forced him to crave to eat the pig swill. But it was at this very low spot in his life that he came to his senses and began to think straight. He remembered his wealthy father and thought of all the people he employed. Perhaps he could go back home and ask for a job, it would surely be better than what he was doing now, looking after pigs.

So Many Wasted Lives

Many young people who have trodden this road get to the end of their tether. They're sick and tired of the lives they've lived. They realise it leads to nowhere but unhappiness and unfulfilment. They've wasted all their opportunities but feel they've gone too far to ever be forgiven and accepted again. I've spoken with homeless young people and asked how they ended up on the streets. Some of their stories would break your heart, we have no idea of the tragedies some people have had to live through. And in the majority of cases they are where they are because of broken relationships.

Never turn your back on your children no matter what they've done. You may be the very last person they'll run to, but welcome them home.

That's what the father of the wayward boy did in the story Jesus told. He could have been so angry at his son squandering all his hard earned money, but every day he looked out to see if his boy was coming back home. And when he did see him coming, he ran out to meet him and made a great big fuss over him. He threw a party to celebrate the fact his son had returned to the family. Don't judge your kids

No Pit So Deep

Jesus came to give his life so that he might deliver us from this present evil world, yes, the world is very evil. Attractive and enticing, but very evil. It eats up our children and spits them out without pity. Your children may reject God now, but it's not the end of their story either. As Corrie Ten Boom said, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still". You know, we are just like batteries. We have the power to choose how we assess people or situations within us but we can exercise that power in either a positive or negative way. Sadly we will never function properly until we're plugged in correctly. If we continually choose to be negative concerning what has been and what is we will be drained and never develop faith. We need to put in a little effort and work at changing our attitude, and we can do this by taking encouragement when looking at these

Biblical figures I've mentioned and the modern day testimonies I've shared, and in time we can learn to be positive and have faith concerning those who matter to us. Habit is overcome by habit, so ... form new habits and try to view people as they can be rather than stay depressed with how they are.

We should never judge anyone based on a season in their lives, for while ever they have breath in their bodies there will always be an opportunity for God to intervene and transform them.

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