



Dare to Believe

When the son of man
comes will he find faith
on the earth?

Joanna Barratt

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Contents

1. Todays Cloud Of Witnesses
2. Take The Pressure
3. Fearful and Unbelieving
4. Fear Of Death
5. Is There A Plan For Your Life?
6. What Did God Say?
7. Let Go, It's Too Heavy
8. Blessings Of Wealth
9. Enoch
10. Being Angry With God
11. Disaster or Destiny?
12. Make God Smile
13. Willing Sacrifice
14. Don't Tempt God
15. Why Did My Kids Backslide
16. Trusting God During The Pruning
17. Stop, Look And Listen
18. Is There a Reason For Your Pain?
19. The Simplicity Of Faith
20. Is Believing In God Enough?

Chapter 1

Today's Cloud Of Witnesses

Maurice and I were away at an International Gospel Outreach Missions Conference in Norwich some years ago, and wow, it was such a blessed weekend! We certainly need more Missionary meetings.

Our lives are so closed in and self-centred, we just don't realise the needs all around us.

There is a big, wide, accessible world out there with lots of hurting, hungry, neglected people; and we sit in our comfortable homes, and comfortable churches, listening to (or preparing) encouraging sermons, enjoying our safe, idyllic lifestyles, with no pressure or threat of persecution.

We boast of being filled with the Holy Spirit just because we can speak with tongues, but **where is the boldness? What risks are we taking?**

If you want to inspire people you don't necessarily have to be a motivational speaker, you just need to be the one out there in front doing the stuff. You'll provoke godly jealousy in the lives of others just because you are bold, taking risks, and

because of that seeing God work!

It's no wonder Jesus chose Peter. In Matthew 16, Jesus called Peter a rock saying:

...and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.'

Matthew 16:18

Peter was reckless. If he saw Jesus doing it, he wanted to do it as well. It was **his** initiative that allowed him to walk on water ...

For goodness sake! This guy actually walked on water! I get excited just thinking about it! He saw Jesus out there and once he had recognised him he said, "If it's you, then bid me come!" And Jesus did! Jesus loves to see faith in operation.

Without faith **it is impossible** to please God.

Hebrews 11:6

Jesus must have been thrilled to bits watching Peter step out of the boat and putting his two feet on solid water! Wow, how thrilling that must have been for them both.

This was an exercise in faith. The boisterous waves which were tossing the boat to and fro weren't being stilled, they were still swirling around them. This was faith in operation. This is the faith that pleases God – freewill faith.

She Heard God's Voice

In Hebrews 11:11 we read that an 89 year old woman was absolutely delighted to receive a promise from God that she was going to have her first baby. She'd been barren throughout the whole of her married life, but when she heard God's voice and believed, she was stirred up in her spirit. The scripture says:

Through faith, Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Hebrews 11:11

This dear 89-year-old lady, who was way past her menopause, wanted her 99-year-old husband to make love to her because she believed a promise. They could have been living celibate lives for years for the very fact that the Bible records that she 'received strength to conceive' shows what a feat this was.

Not only was her frail body strengthened to actually become intimate with her husband, but she was strengthened to carry a child in the womb of her old body for 9 whole months ... and I know what that's like as I was 46 when I had my last baby – and I was only half Sarai's age!

Goodness me, that was some act of faith and it

was certainly freewill on Sarai's part.

Cloud of Witnesses

Sarai had been given a specific promise from God, but what about the 'cloud of witnesses' who simply had faith in God because they loved him so much and looked to the future when they would dwell with him throughout eternity after their physical death?

Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, the three companions of Daniel spoken of in the Old Testament, loved God with all their hearts. Even though they each had honourable positions in the kingdom of Babylon they maintained their allegiance to God and lived a different lifestyle to everyone else. With no opportunity to attend the temple or Israelite feasts, they continued to obey God's laws.

After showing up for a dedication feast they had been invited to by King Nebuchadnezzar they were suddenly faced with the fact they had been tricked because without warning they were now commanded to bow to a statue the King had erected.

They didn't have to think twice about what they should do. Even though the penalty for disobeying this command was to be thrown into a fiery furnace, they loved God more than their earthly life. God had not given them the assurance that he would deliver them from the flames, but because they truly

believed God in their hearts, not just their heads, and wanted to obey his commandments – which included that they should not bow to any other god – they welcomed death, and experienced a mighty miracle of deliverance! This was freewill faith!

Mighty Man of Valour

Have you ever read about Gideon in the book of Judges? What an amazing story that is!

Well, we can't all be a Gideon. God called this one man out of the whole of Israel to head up the army, but poor Gideon kept seeing the numbers in his ranks whittling down.

32,000 men had originally answered his call to battle, but in reality, this is a really small number of soldiers, especially when you consider that Manchester City's Football stadium holds 56,000; and Manchester United's Football stadium holds 75,000 people.

I can just picture the men looking around at those who'd congregated and taking in the stark reality that they were only 32,000 strong and well outnumbered.

They were under enemy occupation, yes, but at least they were alive. Why start a war when there was no chance of winning?

After 22,000 of the initial 32,000 had gone back home because they were afraid God told Gideon that the 10,000 men left were still too many.

So after putting these men through a test God got rid of another 700 men and now only 300 remained.

Angel Visitation

I can understand Gideon having faith because he'd had an angel visitation and God had done miracles for him with the wet and dry fleece, so obviously he was the one God had chosen to lead the battle. But what amazes me are these 300 men!

In Judges 7:12 it tells us that the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the children of the east, lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

300 men were going out against an innumerable multitude to do battle, but at God's instruction, they were to be armed only with a torch and a trumpet. They didn't have one single sword between them!

What on earth were they thinking?

Simple! They were following Gideon – the leader! He had inspired them. He'd heard God, seen the angel, witnessed the miracles and because they could **see** he was empowered in his spirit and was talking about the coming victory with authority – just like Jesus must have done when people said he spoke with authority, not like the scribes – they were up for the fight. This was a freewill act of faith if ever I saw it!

No Weapons

There's a story in 1 Samuel chapters 13 and 14 which tells of Israel being surrounded by an innumerable multitude of Philistines – 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude. When the Israelites saw them they were terrified and ran to hide themselves anywhere they could – in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in high places, and in pits.

King Saul removed himself from where they all were and numbered the soldiers that were still with him. The Bible says it was about 600 men. His army was totally depleted. They didn't even have proper weapons to fight with but had to sharpen all their farming tools, axes and pitchforks with files so they could defend themselves.

A particular day had been set for the battle and Jonathan (King Saul's son) and his armour bearer had gone missing! I don't know what was going on in Jonathan's mind but, without saying a word to his father, he said to his armour bearer, “Come, let's go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised Philistines: it may be that the LORD will work for us. Nothing's too big for our God. He can save by many or by few.”

And his armour bearer said unto him, “Do all that's in your heart: I'm with you.”

Jonathan's Plan

So Jonathan devised a plan and said, "Let's get to a safe place near to them where they can see us, and if they say to us wait there and we'll come to you then we'll not carry on with the plan. But if they say, "Come to us", then we'll take this as a sign that the Lord is going to deliver them into our hands and we'll go up."

So that's what they did. The Philistines challenged them to come to them saying they'd show them a thing or two, but in actual fact, Jonathan and his armour bearer ended up slaughtering the 20 men grouped there!

And then ... **God stepped in!** God saw their freewill faith and it pleased him! God caused an earthquake and all the Philistines trembled for fear and ran off! They were so confused that they were beating down and destroying one another in their panic as they ran! Incredible! But then the Bible is full of these fantastic accounts.

Kids love to hear about David and Goliath; Daniel in the Lion's Den; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Fiery Furnace; Queen Esther; Elijah bringing down fire from Heaven; who were all regarded as men and women of faith just because they took risks.

You know, nobody leaves this earth alive – unless you're going to be caught up together with

the Lord at his second coming, that is.

We're all going to die anyway, so isn't it better to die taking risks and living an exciting life of faith, rather than just fading away in your sleep, never to be remembered for anything other than being someone's relative?

I'll leave that one for you to think about – you may not all see things the way I do. But people will follow those who have real faith. They will be inspired.

Do you want to be a leader? Then do something!

Chapter 2

Take the Pressure

There's nothing quite like a bit of admiration for boosting your confidence and self-esteem. We all like to be liked.

I'm sure that when Moses pictured himself freeing the Israelites from their Egyptian masters and slavery he could visualise a vast company of happy people surrounding him, shouting his name in praise and thankfulness. They would be so grateful, and proud to look on him as their hero. What a slap in the face he received when a comment was made by an Israelite who had witnessed him killing an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew slave! They completely misunderstood what his mission had been. He wasn't a deliverer in their eyes, he was a murderer!

Their reaction filled him with such fear that he ran for his life into the desert.

40 Years later things hadn't improved. After confronting Pharaoh and telling him to let God's people go, the Israelites were ordered to gather their own straw to make bricks but were still expected

to fulfil their daily quota. Because of Moses' interference the burdens of the Israelites, instead of being reduced, were actually increased. What else did he expect them to do other than complain? But their anger was aimed at the one who had apparently caused their trouble – Moses!

Still Complaining

After delivering the whole nation of Israel from Egypt and taking them through the desert on their journey to the promised land, the Israelites still complained about the lack of food and water, even going so far as to say they wished they were still in Egypt! How on earth must Moses have felt about that? God had specifically taken these people into the wilderness to prove them, and poor Moses, simply by being obedient to what God asked him to do, was continually in the line of fire. Moses is actually a wonderful example of someone who could withstand pressure, and he did it because he was the meekest man on earth who always directed his distress to God. He loved with a passion the people he had been sent to deliver and was even willing for his own name to be blotted out of God's book in order to save their lives when God threatened to destroy them.

He could lead, because he could love. He was not a bully, driving them from the rear. He was out in front and they followed because they knew he had a real relationship with God.

Who'd be a Leader

It can be very disheartening to be a leader. People just don't understand things from your perspective. How can they? You are the one getting the directives from God. If they were the leader and not you then the boot would be on the other foot. But because you are the leader then God expects you to act in specific ways.

A leader must be able to take the pressure. If you find it too stressful to withstand the pressure then we have a saying ... "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen".

Because we are not all in positions of authority in churches or workplaces we may not consider ourselves to be leaders, but once we profess to others that we have a relationship with God we are now on view and people are watching to see how we react when under pressure.

Sociologists tell us the most introverted of people will influence 10,000 others in an average lifetime. Imagine how many people you have knowingly and unknowingly influenced in your life so far. Every person you come into contact with is impacted in some way.

Pressure is not usually thought of as something we would welcome. We use the word when we feel burdened, have problems and difficulties, or are in pain, or feel distressed. But if we have the right

attitude we can see pressure as something positive.

Embrace the Pain

My son was given some weights for his birthday. He'd never done weight training before and groaned at the pain he was putting his body through. But after a couple of weeks of lifting the weights, and fighting through the pain, he actually began to boast about the soreness rather than complain. His mentality had altered after he realised that when he lifted weights, which were too heavy for him to lift easily, his muscles ripped, that's what caused the pain, but after the muscles healed they were bigger and stronger. So he began adding more weight, more pressure because he was really pleased with the results. The more pressure you put yourself under when weight training, the bigger your muscles get and the stronger you become!

We were once very friendly with a world-class rugby player who was capped for England many times. He played against the toughest teams in the world, and relished the opportunity to do so, because playing against worthy opponents who put up a good fight put his team under tremendous pressure and caused them to stretch themselves mentally and physically to put their bodies on the line and do real battle in order to win.

You know problems are common to man. Nobody goes through life without experiencing

difficult situations. We don't have to buckle beneath them. We can view them as valuable training, rise to the challenge, take the pressure, and be overcomers.

The Football Match

Some years ago God showed me a vision. I could see a football game in progress. One team was wearing a white kit and the other was dressed in black. The arena was filled to capacity and all the fans were kitted out in the same colours as the teams they were supporting. Both teams were playing ferociously. I saw a white player kick the ball really hard down the field to other teammates who would dribble and weave past the opposition to eventually score a goal. The crowd were immediately on their feet going wild and the cheers were deafening. The game was long and fierce, and sometimes a black player and a white player went for the ball at the same time and kicked the ball really hard. The ball couldn't take the rough treatment and burst, so to continue the game the burst ball was thrown out and a new ball thrown in, because the game was all important.

As I was watching the game I felt sure I was on the pitch, dressed in white, playing my heart out for the Lord. But the Lord revealed to me what it was all about. He said, "Don't think you're one of the players! The game is between angels and devils. You're not one of the spectators either, they are the 'cloud of witnesses'. You are the football!

It's the game that's important! God has a plan. The story has already been written and God will play it out to the end. The ball is necessary to continue the game, but if the ball can't take the pressure and bursts it will be thrown out and replaced by a new ball. If God has chosen you to play a part in what he's doing but you can't take the pressure he will remove you and use somebody else, because he has a plan. It's all about him, not us, as we see in the story of Job and the pressure Satan put on him.

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

2 Chronicles 16:9

Let's get toughened up and learn to not only take the pressure but welcome pressure. Don't buckle beneath it, allow it to do its work strengthening us in our minds, bodies, and spirits. God's trying to make something wonderful out of us. I don't know whether you know this, but diamonds are just lumps of wood which have been put under tremendous pressure for a long, long time.

So don't sell yourself short. Take the pressure.

Chapter 3

Fearful and Unbelieving

There's an old hymn which I've sung many times. I have found great comfort in these precious words.

Why should I charge my soul with care?
The wealth in every mine
Belongs to Christ, God's son and heir,
And he's a friend of mine!
Yes, Jesus is my friend,
And he with me doth all things share
Since I am Christ's and Christ is mine,
Why should I have a care?
For Jesus is a friend of mine!

J. H. Samis

I was in a meeting some time ago and was terribly disturbed by the prayer requests of so many people in the meeting who said they needed prayer. Why is it that so many Christians and Believers are hounded by fears and phobias? Surely there is

something drastically wrong. John says this in his letter to the churches

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

It's impossible to function properly if we are operating in fear as fear has the power to completely immobilise us. Some fears are completely unreasonable and should be seen as such. In Genesis, we read that when God told Adam to have dominion over the earth he specifically said:

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moves upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

Genesis 9:2

When Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden this promise never changed. His curse was not that the animals would turn on him, but that he would have to work for his food and live by the sweat of his brow. Okay, you might want to think twice before going into a cage with a hungry lion but it's unreasonable to have an unhealthy fear of spiders, beetles, mice, etc.

Okay, we may not particularly like them crawling or running about, but it should not give us panic attacks, rob us of our sleep, or stop us from living a normal life.

Do Unto Others

Many people feel intimidated when others criticise and insult them, if they are threatened, or receive hateful e-mails and texts; they can even feel intimidated just by the mere sight of some people. In the majority of cases they neither live with, nor have to come into regular contact with, these hurtful people; it's just their words that do the damage causing stress and intimidation. If you're doing your utmost to live for and honour God, and are treating others as you would like to be treated, then there is a verse in Isaiah which says:

Hearken unto me, you that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear you not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings.

Isaiah 51:7

When will we realise **the devil is a liar!** He is a eunuch. His words cannot produce life, they can only feed us negative thoughts, doubts, and fears, but we have to make the decisions concerning whom we will listen to. We are the masters of our own emotions. Nobody

can make us do anything. We submit to people's thoughts and wills because often it's the easy way out. The Bible is continually exhorting us to stand, to be bold, and to trust, and that's because we find it much easier to give in than to put up a fight. But we give in when we fall into the lulling embrace of Satan who ends up trapping and ensnaring us. The fear of man brings a snare: but as David says in Proverb:

...whoever puts his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

Proverbs 29:25

If we can't overcome the problems I've just mentioned we will never be in the situation where God could ask us to do something special for him. We will always be living in fear and at the mercy of the 'what ifs'; never secure, and never confident, because the devil will always have a stronghold in our lives. What makes matters worse is that we have actually given him the right to be there because we have accepted all his lies and allowed ourselves to live in fear. And this should never be the case. In 2 Timothy the Bible states clearly:

God has **not** given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7

This is a statement! If we have fear, it did not come from God. It is a spirit which has come

from the devil and we have **allowed** ourselves to be deceived, and are continuing to live in that deception. 'If God has truly come into our lives we can be sure of one thing, he will set up his kingdom in our hearts and give us a 'sound mind'. That means we will be able to think straight with the mind of Christ.

Why Have You No Faith?

In Mark 4 we read that Jesus was asleep whilst on board a fishing boat. His disciples woke him during the journey as a life-threatening storm had arisen and they feared for their very lives. Jesus dealt with the situation and stilled the storm (in that calm, supernatural way of his) but then turned to his disciples and asked, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" These were seasoned fishermen, very used to adverse weather conditions, but they were in the middle of a life threatening-storm and yet he expected them to not be fearful and have faith! Is that unreasonable? Of course ,it is. Anyone in that situation would be worried sick. So why did Jesus expect them to not worry and have faith? It was because **he was in the boat with them, of course!**

What's the matter with us? Don't we really believe Jesus is with us? Why are we so fearful when things take us out of our comfort zone?

If God has given us an instruction on where to go or what to do, why do we worry when we

meet unforeseen opposition? Can't God help us to reach our goal? Jesus set his face like a flint and did what God told him to do no matter what obstacles or persecutions were in his path because he had a vision of what was before him. Paul and so many of the 'cloud of witnesses' spoken of in Hebrews 11 did the same. Matthew 10, Jesus told us to:

Fear **not** them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28

And again in Luke 12, Jesus also said:

I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, which after he has killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say unto you, fear him.

Luke 12:5

It's impossible to fear God and man at the same time. To fear God means you will obey his voice no matter what opposition you have from man.

The problem with doubt and fear is that it is contagious. People catch it, and it spreads like wildfire. In Deuteronomy 20:8 God gave Moses conditions for when he gathered the army together. The priests were supposed to rally the troops encouraging them that the Lord would be with them. Then certain

men would be allowed to return home if they had built a new house, but had not dedicated it; planted a vineyard and not yet eaten of it; betrothed a wife and had not yet taken her in marriage. These were all honourable reasons for taking leave from the army. But then the officers were to speak further to the people, and say, 'If any man is fearful and faint-hearted, let him go and return unto his house, lest his fear causes his brethren's heart to faint as well as his heart'.

Go Home if You're Fearful

Gideon was given a similar instruction in Judges 7:3 when he was gathering an army together. He started off with 32,000 men but God told him to proclaim in the ears of the people, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, you can return and depart early from Mount Gilead. Go home!" And 22,000 men turned back; leaving him with only 10,000 men. 22,000 admitted they were scared!

We're witnessing very strange things happening in our lifetime. Things which have never happened before. The Bible calls them the 'birth pangs'. Jesus will be coming back very soon for his Bride, but also to bring great judgement on the earth against those who are rebellious, have done terrible atrocities, and hate God. But for those who are looking for, and waiting with expectancy for Jesus' return we have beautiful words of encouragement

from Isaiah:

Fear not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness. For I the LORD your God will hold your right hand, saying unto you, Fear not; I will help you. Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you says the LORD, and your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 41:10-14

David said:

In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

Psalms 56:4

Solomon said:

Whoever harkens unto me (the wisdom, the voice of God) shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Proverbs 1:33

In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

Proverbs 14:26

These are tremendously encouraging words from the Word of God. We should meditate upon

them and let our minds be renewed with these positive thoughts. They will give life not death.

God does not excuse us when we lack faith, In fact, without faith it is impossible to please God. We can all get affected by what's being put by the media things concerning a virus, 5G, contaminated foods, and vaccines ... the list is endless. I've felt it too – it's contagious! But I've had to bring every thought into captivity and remember that God is in control.

No Fear

The world has every right to fear because God's judgement is going to come on the world, but I have placed my confidence and trust in Almighty God. I have been forgiven and cleansed by the precious sacrifice which Jesus Christ made on my behalf. I've been reconciled to God and he has accepted me as his child. If he said he would look after me, then I must not fear.

If Shadrack, Mechack and Abednego could be delivered from a fiery furnace; if Daniel could be delivered from the mouths of hungry lions; if Gideon could fight a battle with only 300 men against an innumerable multitude without even one sword between them, then surely God can protect us from whatever a virus or 5G can do to us!

Revelation 21 paints an incredibly beautiful picture of what the new Heaven and Earth which

God will create will be like. And it says 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.'

This is promised to those who overcome. To those who get the victory over all the lies and hindrances to have complete faith and trust in God that the devil puts before them in this life. But in verse 8 it lists those who will not be allowed access into this new creation and the fearful and unbelieving, are at the very top of the list.

Let's get a grip – now! It's imperative.

Chapter 4

Fear of Death

Do you remember the song by Albert King entitled, 'Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die'? Why is it that everyone is afraid to die? The Bible talks about this fear of death being a real thing

...And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Hebrews 2:15

I remember a conversation I had with a woman I knew very well shortly before she passed away. She was in her early 90's and was in great pain, had been for years, and was bemoaning the fact that she was all alone in an old people's home. Her husband had already died, most of her children lived hundreds of miles away, and she was sick of this life. I felt truly sorry for her, she looked so pathetic and frail lying hunched up in her bed.

Afraid to Die

"Do you want me to pray that the Lord takes you?" I asked. She had been saved for 40 years, had been supernaturally healed by God many times, and prophesied. But she spun her head round to look at me ...

"No, I don't!" She said.

"Why not?" I asked gently.

After some moments she looked into my eyes with awful sadness and said:

"I'm afraid!"

"What of?" I asked. But I knew. We all know deep inside.

The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27 It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment. It also says that we reap what we sow. And we know that once a seed has grown you harvest far more than was ever sown. That's just a fact of sowing and reaping. This woman may have been a Christian for 40 years but she was a very bitter and unforgiving woman, and she knew in her spirit she was on the very brink of facing God, yet wasn't ready.

Death holds us all in its grip. I don't think there's a single person who's ever lived who has not feared death at some time in their lives. The will to survive is so strong. In 2 Kings 6 the Bible even records that when Samaria was besieged by the Syrians creating a great famine, women actually boiled their children and ate them to stay alive.

This fear is instinctive. It's part of our make-up. We don't have to work it up, it's just there. What's so frightening about death?

The First time death was mentioned was in the Garden of Eden when Adam was instructed not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it would lead to his death. God had given him everything he could possibly desire to eat, including the Tree of Life which would keep him living healthy and strong forever. But he didn't realise the repercussions his action would have on the whole of mankind and just lived for the moment. Immediately after rebelling against God Adam was thrown out of the garden, the ideal place to live, and God removed himself back to heaven, no longer walking in a relationship in the garden with Adam.

Rebellion Cuts Us Off From God

Adam was a son of God when he was created and enjoyed real one-to-one fellowship with his creator and Heavenly Father. But once Adam disobeyed God's one and only commandment he was cut off from God. Rebellion cuts us off from God and it leads to death. Mankind no longer has the right to a relationship with God because God has removed himself and will only reveal himself to those who look for him and are prepared to love him. What does it take to lose our fear of death?

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

... Jesus Christ came in flesh and blood; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Hebrews 2:9 and 14-15

Wow, what a gift! What an incredible promise is offered to those who are prepared to put their trust in God and their lives into his hands. Jesus, who lived a perfect, sinless life, tasted death and separation from God so that we don't need to. God accepted his sacrifice and it completely wiped out the debt that we all owe for our sins.

Don't you think God deserves our love and gratitude for such an incredible gift? I think so! Well, if you really are thankful to God and are learning to love him, God will reveal himself to you. He will become really real! But we must never forget that God searches our hearts. He knows the absolute truth about us. We can say with our lips that we are thankful and love God but He sees us. Jesus said he that loves me keeps my commandments. God says exactly the same. If you love God you will keep his laws. Jesus's commandments were exactly the same as God's, it's just that he went into more detail concerning how we fulfil them. And he

emphasised that we should love each other as he loved us.

O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

The woman I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was afraid to meet God because she knew her heart was not clean. Her conscience troubled her. O to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man! This should be our aim.

This would free us from the fear of death and of standing before our God to give an account of the way we have lived on the earth.

Fear Is Not Of God

Ask God to search your heart and highlight the areas, or things you do, which offend him. Be honest with yourself and try to see yourself as others see you. Ask God to help you and deliver you from your offensive ways. Get right with God. Get free of your fear of death.

I have been to funerals where the atmosphere was so charged with the sense of victory I have desired to be the one in the coffin. For those who truly love God and have lived their lives wanting to

please and serve him death should be our greatest goal and ambition because it means we can leave this sinful, carnal prison of flesh behind and live in eternal freedom with our precious Lord, and Master, and Father.

Ask yourself, Am I afraid to die? Get right with God and you will never need to be afraid again.

Chapter 5

Is There a Plan for Your Life?

I want to ask you a question. Do you belong to God? Do you believe God has a plan for your life? If your answer is yes, then why give the devil credit for the things that happen to you? If God really does have a plan for your life can anything that happens to you be random?

I was reading the Bible some time back and realised what an incredible start in life Moses had. As a Hebrew baby boy, he should have been destroyed. It was the commandment of the Pharaoh himself. But the child's mother would have none of that – king or no king. She fought for the life of her child and managed to hide him for three months as he was a good baby and didn't fuss. But when Jochebed (his mother) realistically saw she could no longer hide him she made a little wicker basket which she daubed with pitch, placed her baby in the basket, and set it in the flags by the banks of the River Nile. Then she let go and committed her child's future to God.

A Divine Encounter

Now another woman comes on the scene. This time it's the daughter of Pharaoh, the very man who had given the commandment to destroy all the baby Hebrew boys two years old and under. She came to bathe in the Nile and saw the little wicker basket. When she opened it, lo and behold she saw a little hungry, crying, Hebrew baby and had compassion on it. She knew what her father had commanded, but something rose up inside her also which made her want to fight for this child's life. Miriam, the baby's older sister who had been told to watch out for her little brother, witnessed this whole scenario. She rushed forward to ask if she should find a wet nurse for the baby and when the princess gave permission she ran home to fetch their mother. Miraculously Jochebed, Moses's own mother, was now paid by Pharaoh's daughter to take Moses to her family home to breastfeed until he was weaned.

Thank God for these two women who defied the ungodly commandments of the Pharaoh. Without them, we wouldn't have a Moses. What risks they both took. What the devil meant for evil God completely turned around and used for good, placing Moses in a privileged and protected place where he was nourished with the finest foods and education.

But when God called Moses at the age of 80 it almost seemed like he didn't know God. Sure he

knew he was a Hebrew as he'd been circumcised by his parents, he probably knew about God because his parents were certainly God-fearing people who'd disobeyed the Pharaoh's commandment to have Moses destroyed when he was a baby. His mother, who was employed by the Pharaoh's daughter to wet nurse him, would surely have wanted her child to know about God, especially knowing that after she had weaned him he would be brought up in an Egyptian palace. But when he ran from Egypt at the age of 40 after killing an Egyptian taskmaster he not only lived with a Midian priest, he married his daughter. Moses was a man of destiny surrounded by many foreign false gods.

Moses Asked For God's Name!

But when you've been chosen by Jehovah there is something inbuilt which can discern his voice above all other voices. You may not have been properly introduced to him, but something in your spirit knows him. Moses was 80 yet Moses asked, "When I come to the children of Israel, and say to them, The God of **your** fathers has sent me to you; and they say to me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? ... Who are you?"

He didn't have a personal relationship with Jehovah yet for 80 years God had been working on him and preparing him for this job. Moses didn't know God, but God knew Moses. That's the amazing

thing about God, he is totally in control and always working towards fulfilling his plans. He'd singled out Moses to speak with Pharaoh from his very birth. In Exodus 3 we read that Moses turned aside to see why a burning bush wasn't being consumed.

And the LORD God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses, I'm the God of **your Father ...**
Exodus 3:4-6

Wow, fancy God saying that! Even though Moses was brought up as Pharaoh's grandson, he'd lived with his real family for maybe five or six years before going to live at the palace, and knew his real father Amram, as he was 137 when he died. Amram was from the tribe of Levi and was a very God fearing-man who would have packed into little Moses as much as he possibly could whilst he lived with them. His older son Aaron actually became the very first high priest, and those who succeeded him were priests after the Order of Aaron. The Bible records that when Moses was grown and knew his real father Amram, as he was 137 when still living in Egypt, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens. He knew he was one of them. Yet God didn't reveal himself to Moses until he was 80 years old.

... I'm the God of **your father**, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses

hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

Exodus 3:6

We all have one thing in common with Moses – having a knowledge of God is not enough, we need to get to know him personally, otherwise, we'll always be grieving our past instead of realising there is a divine reason for the events which have taken place in our lives, and we'll continually be fighting what God's trying to do in us. God had a purpose for Moses but he couldn't fulfil it until his character had been changed.

I Could Have Died At Birth

The circumstances surrounding my birth weren't normal either as I had the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck. If the devil had managed to have his way I would have been strangled at birth. When the doctor did cut the cord to free me he accidentally snipped my mother's womb causing terrible internal complications. She had three major operations to correct the problems but none of them were successful. Mum was placed on the hospital records as having an incurable condition and lived in constant pain. Cutting me free caused awful pain for my mother. It wasn't until I was nine years old that God revealed himself to my Mum and Dad and the very first time they went to church my mum was prayed for and miraculously healed. The doctors could not believe the transformation.

Our Life Is A Prophecy

Some years ago my pastor preached a sermon showing how the lives of people in the Bible were actually prophetic. Moses had been delivered out of the water when he was a baby, but later on, he delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt by taking them all through the water. And his sermon made me think about how my journey began. I've come to realise that what my pastor preached was true, our lives are prophetic. God has needed to cut me free of things many times. I'm not saying that's the sole purpose for why I was born, but God has shown, through the way I was born, that this is one of the most effective ways in which he deals with me.

Maurice and I were in a music band for many years and did lots of touring. Because of this, we took out an expensive insurance policy to cover our musical equipment all over Europe. One morning as we were praying Maurice informed me that our insurance coverage had run out and we needed money that very day to renew the policy. I didn't have money, and neither did he, and because I felt this was really important I prayed boldly in absolute faith that God would supply our need – today! I then went off to the recording studio as I was booked for a jingle singing session. Normally we were paid at the end of the month but for some

reason, the producers said they wouldn't be around then so paid us that very same day. Consequently, I came back to Maurice waving a fat check – our miraculous answer to prayer, and we renewed our insurance cover.

Our Instruments Were Stolen

Some months later we'd set our equipment up in a church after the Sunday morning meeting and went home for our meal. When we returned to the church in the afternoon before the evening meeting we found that not only had the church been broken into, but all our instruments had been stolen. It was very inconvenient at the time but we weren't too worried as we were insured ... or thought we were. The insurance company found a loophole in the fine print and wouldn't pay out. I was devastated, especially as God had done a miracle to provide the money for the insurance coverage in the first place! I immediately wrote off all insurance companies calling them thieves, but Maurice got a different message. He saw clearly how ridiculous and hypocritical it was to trust the world to protect us when we told everyone we served the living God! This was a major step forward where our living by faith was concerned. We brought our need to God and he provided us with more equipment but this time we didn't insure it.

Whilst I was pregnant with my first child

Maurice and I were invited to have Sunday dinner with the minister of the church we had just preached in. The pastor brought in a suit jacket and asked Maurice to try it on. It fitted him perfectly so the minister ran back upstairs and brought down the trousers to go with that jacket plus 7 other suits and, amazingly, they all fitted, except for the fact I had to let all the trousers down 1 inch!

We Were Musicians

Now at this point, we classed ourselves as musicians. We went about doing concerts and would both weave our message of discipleship in between songs. Because we saw ourselves as musicians I sewed Maurice bright, frilly shirts made out of the same material as my dresses, but for some time God had been telling Maurice that he needed to smarten up and become more serious. At that time Maurice didn't even have one tie in his wardrobe.

A couple of months later Maurice and I were on holiday when we received a phone call informing us that we had been robbed and all our musical equipment had been stolen. We looked at one another and knew this wasn't a coincidence as God knew that as we had no insurance there was no 'Plan B'. We just prayed together and asked, "Why have you allowed this Lord? What do you want us to do now?" And God told us. He said he'd taken from us what we didn't need because to bring in the new he

had to take away the old. Then he said to Maurice, "Now will you preach?"

God Took What We Didn't Need

God didn't only take our musical equipment away, he took our old ministry away and redirected us into a new one, where Maurice was to be known as a man of a God rather than an entertainer. Maurice feared it as he'd seen the way his father, who had been a real Man of God, lived and he did his best to avoid it. He knew the cost. But if God has a plan for your life there is no such thing as a random coincidence. Everything that happens in your life is meant to direct you into that purpose. For us, Maurice and myself we've decided to trust God and have no Plan B. We've made the declaration that if we can prove by our lives that our God is worth serving, despite the circumstances, then our lives will have been well spent.

You may be bewildered by things which happen in your life, but if you believe with all your heart that you belong to God, and you believe with all your heart God has a plan for your life, then stop giving the devil credit for the unsavoury things which happen to you. If you accredit all the blessings to God and accredit all the tragedies to Satan, it means you have two gods controlling your life. One for the good things and one for the bad.

A Real Relationship

Job said, "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" So, as Joshua said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve!"

Our main purpose in life is to have a real relationship with Almighty God, not just to have knowledge of him, and to have only one God.

So instead of mourning your upbringing and background look to see what God is prophesying through them. Learn to recognise and appreciate the way God deals with you. One revelation of God's divine purpose for you could change the rest of your walk with him.

Chapter 6

What Did God Say?

I'd like to talk about how precise God is when He speaks to us. Whether we get a personal word, or whether it's written in scripture for our instruction it's certainly specific and, if it's not, then we shouldn't guess because acting on a guess is actually being presumptuous.

After turning aside to stare in amazement at a bush that was burning but not being consumed, Moses was stunned when the God he only had knowledge of revealed himself saying he wanted Moses to go back to Egypt to tell Pharaoh, whom he was related to by adoption, to let God's people go. Obviously, Moses was reluctant as 40 years previously he'd run away from Egypt after murdering an Egyptian.

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt. I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh,

and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And the Lord said, Certainly I will be with you; And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? **(Moses didn't even know this God, he'd only heard about him)** And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, You shall say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.

Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: and I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

And they shall hearken to your voice: and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and shall say to him, The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us: and now let us go, we beseech you, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass,

that, when you go, you shall not go empty.

Exodus 3:7-21

And you shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto you, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your son, even your firstborn.

Exodus 4:22

God was so specific with Moses. He told him precisely how his plan would begin and end for getting the children of Israel out of Egypt. He even told him he'd kill Pharaoh's firstborn son, and that when the Israelites left they wouldn't leave empty-handed. But Moses really didn't want the job. He fought as much as he dared by saying that nobody would believe God had appeared to him. At one time Moses had been a force to be reckoned with in Egypt for in Acts 7 we read this:

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Acts 7:22

But now he was saying that after being in the wilderness 40 years he'd forgotten palace etiquette and wouldn't know how to speak to the Pharaoh anymore.

And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before, nor since you have spoken unto your servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

Exodus 4:10

So what happened? Well, Moses obeyed God and returned. Pharaoh's heart got harder and harder giving God multiple opportunities to show all his wonders before he eventually killed, not only Pharaoh's son but **all** the firstborn sons in Egypt. After this the Egyptians couldn't get rid of the Israelites fast enough, and those who were still alive lavished gifts on them in the hope they wouldn't be cursed. Everything happened just as God had predicted.

But it wasn't easy for Moses, he was opposed every step of the way. Not only by Pharaoh but also by the Israelites. And the fact that he had all this opposition must have been a real challenge to his faith.

When circumstances happen which seem strange and bewildering you have to turn your eyes to the Lord like Moses must have done on numerous occasions, and ask yourself, "What did God say?" There will always be a preceding word that you can refer to.

I Felt I Had Been Cursed

When I was 12 years old I watched a film entitled

'Black Gold' which T.L. Osborne, an American evangelist, was showing around the country. At the end of the meeting, my dad took me to meet Tommy Osborne. He took my hand, looked directly into my eyes, and said, "See you on the mission field!" Well, after just seeing that film which was all about the witchcraft practised in Africa emphasising how these people really needed God, I knew God had spoken to me, but like with Moses it filled me with horror. I felt I had been cursed. That film terrified me!

40 years later I found myself accompanying my husband on a mission trip to Africa. I had no idea why I was there as I didn't feel I could relate in any way to these people. They were so poor, and I'd come on a plane from such a wealthy country. During one meeting Maurice had preached twice already but the people wanted more. He looked at me and said, "J, you've got to help me out here, I'm flagging. You need to speak to them!"

I just stared at him and then said, "What can I say?"

"Give them your testimony"

Well, I felt it would be totally irrelevant but did as I was told and shared my background and how God had changed my life. At the end of my talk, the minister spoke to the people for some minutes in his own language then turned to face me.

Nothing Is Wasted With God

"Nobody here has ever wanted to kill their own

father," he said. "They wouldn't even dream of it. I've just told them that if God can save someone as wicked as this white woman, he can save anyone!"

Apparently, the trauma and hatred I had experienced during my home life were more relevant than I could ever imagine. For 20 years we ministered in that very dark continent, and like with Moses what I thought was a curse actually turned out to be a great blessing. Nothing is wasted with God, there is always a purpose. But we need to take God seriously.

Many years ago Maurice converted our house into self-contained apartments and rented them to subsidise us in the ministry. But one day God told him not to rent off apartments anymore as he would supply our needs, so in obedience, Maurice terminated all the tenancies. A couple of years went by, but then a young man from the church needed accommodation so Maurice said he could move into one of his empty flats. The young man moved all his stuff into the house one day but moved it all out again the very next day without spending one night in the house. Strange!

A couple of months later another lady from the church said her landlord had thrown her out and she had nowhere to live. So again Maurice felt sorry for her and said she could rent one of his flats. On the evening of the Friday she moved in she nipped out to the local chippy for some fish and chips to eat in her room. But she was nowhere to be seen over the weekend – she didn't even attend the church. Maurice

wondered if she was okay and asked someone to knock on her door. No answer. After waiting some minutes he decided to look in the room as anything could have happened to her. As he opened the door a terrible stench hit him. The fish and chips paper lay on the floor, and the woman lying in the bed... but she was dead. Because the gas fire had been on all weekend the stench from the body fluids which had left her body made it difficult to breathe. The police were called in and the autopsy confirmed that she had died the very same night she'd moved in.

A Painful And Serious Lesson

Maurice was dazed ... "Why Lord? Why would you wait for her to move into the house and then let her die? She could have died anywhere!"

But then Maurice remembered what God had said. What a lesson!

We all want God to speak to us. He may give you very detailed instructions like he did with Moses, and he may give you very few words, like he did with me and Maurice, but one thing's for sure -- he doesn't play games and he expects us to obey when he speaks.

What has God said to you?

Chapter 7

Let Go, It's Too Heavy

I want to share a little bit about burdens. What is a burden? Well, one definition is that it's a heavy load.

Some heavy loads are taken on willingly. When I was pregnant with my first child at 39 years of age it was a thrilling experience. I certainly didn't class it as a burden at the beginning. Because of my advanced age, I thought this would be my one and only pregnancy so savoured every moment. I even enjoyed, rather than endured, the morning sickness; and the continual kicking (oh I loved that); and once I was over the stage where I just looked as though I was putting on weight and you could see clearly it was a pregnancy, I actually enjoyed looking at my swollen belly. But let me tell you, the closer I got to my delivery date the more I looked forward to being relieved of this hump everyone was oohing and aahing over. It had become a burden. I'd never had a baby before and began to panic wondering how on earth this increasingly growing baby was going to get

out! Now that was the part I was really scared about and how grateful I was to be relieved of that burden.

An Independent Child

Even though I still had a few extra pounds to get rid of I felt so light once I was able to hold my baby in my arms rather than in my womb. When I picked him up to cuddle or breastfeed him it was a delight to be able to look at his little face, but even that became a chore as the months went by because he got heavier and heavier. What a blessing when he decided to walk all by himself when he was 8 months old. Wow, that child was so independent! My little 'Maurice Minor' was walking just like his Dad at 12 months old – minus the beard and guitar of course, and I felt so free now that I didn't have to carry him around all the time. It's great that some burdens have their own expiry date.

Another definition of a burden is responsibility, and we all have responsibilities whether we like it or not. But it depends on our attitude as to whether our responsibility is regarded as a burden. I now had a responsibility to feed and clothe my children, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but I never regarded that as a burden – it was my privilege and delight. Family life was the thing that truly satisfied me and made me happy. None of my children were accidents or mistakes, they were all God's way of enriching my life.

I did, however, find it difficult to submit to my husband when I was first married. I knew it was my responsibility as a godly wife and mother to set a good example for my children. There was no point trying to bring them up as godly children if I couldn't be a godly wife as children learn far more by what we do than what we say. And even if I managed to submit outwardly it was a struggle for a few years to submit inwardly.

I Felt Trapped

You see, I'd lived on my own and done things my way for many years before getting married at 37 years of age for the first time so had a lot of submitting to do. I reached a point where I felt I wasn't cut out for marriage. I had a very good husband but I didn't want to take orders or be accountable for all my movements. I felt trapped. Marriage had become a burden.

I remember sitting myself down one day and going through the options available to me to solve my being miserable; I could just leave the house and find somewhere else to live; or I could leave and take the children with me. The problem was that none of these options seemed like good solutions. So I asked myself, "What do **you** want?"

Well, I wanted a happy marriage. I wanted my children to have a great childhood and grow up in a happy environment where their Mum and Dad were together because they loved each other, not out

of duty, or for the sake of a good appearance.

"Well then," I said to myself, "If that's what you want, how do you get it?"

I Had To Humble Myself

My problem was I'd been a Christian too long, and had been in ministry for years, I knew what the answer to that question was, I just had to love my husband. There was no point saying I loved God whom I couldn't see if I couldn't love my husband whom I could see. I just had to humble myself and learn to be a submissive wife with the right attitude and not because it was my duty. Once I got this into my thick skull and tried to put it into practice I was amazed at the way Maurice responded to me. He actually saw my efforts and it softened him up. The responsibility to be a godly wife and mother now became a pleasure rather than a burden because we were working together in unity and I wasn't putting up a fight anymore, and I ended up getting exactly what I wanted.

Another definition of burden is that it's something that is a cause of worry; something which is grievous, wearisome, or oppressive.

I carried this sort of burden for years. When I left home at the age of 16 I thought I would leave it behind but in actual fact, I just carried it with me everywhere I went. I was never free. I've come to realise that some burdens we carry, although thrust

upon us initially, actually become very precious to us.

I grew up with real hatred in my heart for my parents. I knew it wasn't acceptable for a Christian but I held on to it. And because I justified my hatred I nursed it and lived in denial that I had a problem by burying it deep inside me. If I'm honest I didn't want to be free of my hatred because it would have left a great big hole in my heart which I feared God would fill with love, and I really didn't want that.

Experiences Mould And Fashion Us

I don't know what burden you're carrying. We all pass through loads of stuff on our journey through life and I've found everyone has a story to tell. The experiences we go through are meant to mould and fashion us to become who God intends us to be, but if we hang on to our burdens they'll end up destroying us by crippling and shrivelling up our spirits. And there's nothing worse than an ugly spirit.

A few years ago I had a vision of a lady who was wearing a baby carrier on the front of her body. It didn't have a baby in it but it was full and bulging with a very heavy burden. This woman wore the carrier continuously. She would get out of bed wearing it; shower with it on; get dressed and put it back on outside of her clothing; she'd put her coat on to go out and wear the carrier

outside her coat. When she boarded buses she'd sit next to people and open her carrier to show off her precious burden to anyone who wanted to indulge her or show a bit of sympathy. She'd go back home, take off her coat and put the carrier back on as she did her household chores; then finally when she went to bed she'd get undressed and strap the carrier back on before getting into bed. There was no letting go of this carrier, it was a very precious burden to her.

A Precious Burden

But then I saw her in church on a Sunday morning. When she went to the communion rail she knelt down, took off her carrier and set it down whilst she took the bread and wine. She knelt there sobbing and poured out her heart to the Lord for quite some time as she gave him her burden. But then, as she got up to go back to her seat, she picked up her loaded carrier and strapped it back on to herself again. I looked in amazement at her in my vision wondering why she would do such a thing. She'd laid it down, given it to the Lord, but then picked up her heavy burden again. Why?

The Bible instructs and encourages us to hand all our burdens over to the Lord and Psalm 37 says three times ... 'Fret not yourself', stressing that we shouldn't be anxious, worried, troubled, or agitated about anything. Just leave it with God

to sort out!

Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Psalms 27:14

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Soul, hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

Psalms 42:11

Cast your burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain you.

Psalms 55:22

Trust in God at all times; you people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

Psalms 62:8

Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.

Psalms 146:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:5

Blessed is the man that trusts in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.

Jeremiah 17:7

Be careful for nothing (*that means don't be worried, or anxious about anything*); but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (*Talk to God about it!*)

Philippians 4:6

Cast all your care upon him; for he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

Don't you think it's about time you did yourself a favour and not only lay your burdens down before the Lord but left them with him?

It's necessary to let things go for the simple reason that they're too heavy! Jesus said:

Come unto me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Don't rob Jesus of a blessing, he **wants** to give you peace.

Chapter 8

Blessings of Wealth

What is the kingdom of God all about? In scripture, it appears there are three manifestations of the kingdom of God. Many errors in our understanding of the kingdom today come about from confusing one of these manifestations with the other, and Satan has capitalised on this and taken advantage of these misunderstandings. On the back of them, he has planted false conceptions of the kingdom which have resulted in a counterfeit kingdom – something which looks exactly like the kingdom of God, and seemingly has scriptures to justify it, but is in fact nothing to do with the kingdom that Jesus preached, nor how we are to live.

The first manifestation is seen in the Old Testament. Israel was chosen to be the Kingdom of God, but the kingdom was taken from them and given to others.

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing

forth the fruits thereof.

Matthew 21:43

Jesus brought in the second manifestation when he started preaching about the Kingdom of God, saying that it was within a man. Finally, the third manifestation will be when Jesus comes to reign on earth for 1,000 years, for this is also referred to as the Kingdom of God in scripture.

Motives Matter

God doesn't look necessarily at what we do – he looks at why we do what we do. He looks at our motive. Wrong motives always produce wrong doctrine or teaching because they flavour everything we look at in the Bible, and the problem is that these wrong doctrines lead us into the wrong kingdom.

The Pharisees had wrong doctrines. They added the traditions of men to the commandments of God, putting heavy burdens of religion on people's backs, but the very root of their problem was that they had wrong motives. But don't criticise them too quickly for we are not immune from having this problem ourselves. It's all too easy for our hearts to deceive us because as it says in the book of Jeremiah:

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

Jeremiah 17:9

We look for loopholes when we find things unpalatable to our flesh in God's word, and we can often find a 'get-out' in the shape of a doctrine that supports the view we'd prefer to believe. But we're deceiving ourselves, and we've let a wrong motive control our thinking.

Wealth – Blessing Or A Curse

When you do a bit of travelling around the world you begin to wonder what a blessing of wealth can do. Is wealth really a blessing, or could it be a curse in disguise? Many people in the world are hungry because they are poor. But even in the poorest of places I have been in homes which are sometimes no more than tiny shacks with not only no furniture, but no room for furniture, yet they own a TV and can be entertained by our Western World. We display our possessions and corrupt the morals of these poor onlookers.

My family had a TV when I was a child. In fact, we were one of the first families in our hood to own one, and all the neighbours, and especially the kids, did their best to get invited in so that they could watch it with us. But the TV, and all the other stuff we gathered around ourselves, didn't make us happy. We still fought and argued like cats and dogs,

and ended up hating each other. The thing I desired most as a child was a happy home life.

I was scared stiff when I had my own kids, not knowing whether they would turn out the way I did. One thing I greatly admired about my pastor, who also became my father-in-law, was that all his four children grew into strong Christians without deviating or backsliding. They don't meet up together very often, but when they do they all have good relationships and would help each other out of any problem.

Setting An Example

Maurice and I really tried to set a good example for our children. Before going to school each morning we'd have a time of prayer or would take Bread and Wine, together. We only spent 10 minutes, but we could pack quite a bit into that short time if we were really determined. It was always difficult to get the kids in the right mood, and sometimes we had to be very firm to make them pay attention. Kids are kids, and ours were no exception. But a wonderful thing happened which was a tremendous blessing to me, and I wanted to share it to encourage those of you who are struggling. God can work with anyone, anywhere. My children are all grown up now but this is a testimony of what happened when they were young.

I always had difficulty getting the kids up for

school in the morning. No problem at weekends, in fact, they would wake up earlier than they needed to for school! But no matter how many alarm clocks I bought, I ended up having to individually get my kids out of bed.

It all started with Izaak wanting to do something to prove that he loved me and God. He was 10 years old and he decided he would like to bring me a cup of tea in bed each morning. He set his alarm and brought me a cup of tea at 6:50 am, then got into my bed with me until my alarm went off at 7:00. This was a lovely treat for both of us.

She Was Determined

A couple of weeks after this, Tamar and I (she was only six at the time) were reading the Bible before she went to bed and she also felt that she wanted to please God.

“Mummy, can we get up at 6:00am instead of 7:00am so that we can spend some time with God before school?”

I was very touched that she wanted to do this but didn't really think she meant it. Well, as it was Friday, I told her that if she reminded me on Sunday night before she went to bed then I would get her up at 6:00am on Monday morning to read the Bible and pray together. Sure enough on Sunday night, she asked me again, so I did.

We had a lovely time together. I read some of

the Bible, then she read some, and we talked and prayed together. At 6:45am Izaac arrived in the kitchen all bleary-eyed in his undies and was miffed that I hadn't told him I was getting up early.

“Don't do it again without telling me, Mum”, he said.

When I explained that I would be getting up each morning with Tamar, both he and Nathan (who at that time was 13 years old) said they wanted to get up too.

A Real Sacrifice

Now I need to explain something. Nathan was in the habit of getting up at 7.45am, just in time to have the prayer with the family before Tamar and Izaac went off to school as, since he'd reached the age of 12, we had been home-schooling him. Nathan loved his bed, he always had, and this was a real sacrifice to say that he would get up at 6:00 am. After chatting to the kids I decided 6:30 would be the best time. We could have breakfast first and we could meet with God between 7:00 and 8:00pm. I let them know this was voluntary and stressed that if they didn't get up themselves I wouldn't be getting them up, as this was their idea.

Can you imagine the change that came over our household? Izaac brought my cup of tea at 6:20, then got in my bed for a cuddle until 6:30 when Tamar's alarm went off. She then came into my

bedroom to wake me, Izaac got out of my bed so Tamar got in for a 5-minute cuddle, and then went off to get dressed. As I walked out of my bedroom I met Nathan who was just coming out of his bedroom, and I marvelled at the way my children were doing this themselves. I read to them from a Children's Bible which was an abridged version of the King James version published in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. It was brilliant for the children, giving them proper scripture, but leaving out the bulky parts which were hard to digest. And God met us.

Izaac Was Scared

One morning we were reading about the call of Samuel. God called Samuel in his sleep and when he had recognised it was God he asked him to speak. God told Samuel what he was going to do in Eli's house because Eli had neglected to chastise his sons for the wrong they had done. God said no matter how many sacrifices and offerings Eli made for his sons from now on, he would not accept them because they had defiled his temple. After I'd finished reading the scripture and talked with the children, I asked them what had come out to them personally. Izaac looked very sober and scared, saying he had been surprised that God had said he wouldn't accept any more sacrifices and offerings for Eli's sons. He asked if God would reject him for the

things he had done. He'd tried so hard to give up certain things which he knew weren't Godly.

Dear Izaac. My heart warmed towards him. He was so soft inside and wanted so much to please God, but he was fighting 'Adam' like the rest of us. He broke down in tears and begged God to come into his heart and take away all his desires for wrong things and told me fiercely that he wanted to be baptised. Suddenly, God's presence came very strongly into the room and I prayed and spoke in tongues over him. The other children could hardly believe what was happening as this was so different from what went on normally. I prophesied over Izaac as God spoke to him. Then I prophesied over Nathan. God was really moving.

A Move of God On Izaac

The week after this Maurice and I were having a retreat week when we fasted and prayed. Izaac said he wanted to join us by giving up his 'fruit break' and 'lunch break' at school. On the Saturday during the retreat an Evangelist and his wife, friends of ours, came round to visit. Whilst chatting together, the Evangelist said he would like to lay hands on Izaac and pray for him, as he had a word from the Lord for him. Izaac knelt down as hands were laid on him and God really touched him. He said he felt really freaky and was in a daze, shaking all over and wanting to cry all the time. He hung around me as

though there was some magnetic force field between us. I sat down to cuddle and comfort him because he felt so weird, and then the Evangelist came over and sang the song, “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me ...” and the spirit of God came once more upon Izaac. The poor boy had been touched so much by God that he didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, but he had a real experience that hopefully he will remember all his life.

He Earned 25 Merit Marks

A couple of days later, whilst still fasting, Izaac was required to take the assembly at school together with a couple of other boys. He had been so motivated by the Bible studies we were sharing together in the mornings that he started preaching one of the stories we had studied about David and Goliath. The teachers were so impressed at his performance that he earned 25 merits for his effort!

I was thinking the other day about what I would ask for if God said I could have anything as he did with Solomon. What could God do to really and truly bless me? After a very great deal of honest thought, I came to the conclusion that the thing I most desired would be that my children would be sold out for God and that we could, as a family, fulfil God’s purpose in our lives. My little bundle of laughter (that’s what Izaac’s name means), and my

other two offspring, are really just bits of putty in the hands of Almighty God.

True wealth is never stuff – stuff can be stolen, it can rust or get moth-eaten, and never fills you with true satisfaction. Jesus said we were to lay up for ourselves true riches in heaven where moth and rust won't corrupt, neither will thieves break through nor steal.

If I could stand before Jesus accompanied by my children, the fruit of my womb, what a joy and fulfilment for me that would be. Let's keep believing. That would be wealth indeed.

Chapter 9

Enoch

We're told in Genesis 5:21 that:

Enoch was 65 years old when his son Methuselah was born: and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah 300 years, and had more sons and daughters.

Genesis 5:21

From this scripture, you get the impression that Enoch didn't walk with God before he had Methuselah. The birth of this child brought him into a close relationship with God.

The fact Enoch named his son Methuselah (which means 'Man of the dart' or 'When he is dead it shall be sent' – the deluge, the flood) indicates he had a revelation that the world would last just as long as that child would, and no longer. God was saying, "When that child dies I will deal with the world!"

How would we react if we'd received such a revelation from God?

Fearing God's Judgement

Suppose God said that one of your children would last as long as the world. What would you do? God didn't mention to Enoch that Methuselah would be the oldest man on record, so getting a revelation like that would surely make him think God's judgement would be imminent. Can you imagine what went on in his mind every time the child had a cough, or a cold, or fell sick? He would have been watching that child like a hawk, with bated breath, expecting God's judgement any moment.

From the time the child was born, the world seemed to lose all attraction for Enoch. He realised there was a day of reckoning coming and he knew he couldn't squander however many days he had left by living a frivolous, unprofitable life. He had to make sure his words and actions counted when under the scrutiny of his Maker. He needed to know he could stand and not crumble in shame. Psalms 1 says:

... the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Psalms 1:5

The man or woman who begins to walk with God feels no pull towards the world because when

you're on a quest for truth it's very easy to see through all the glitter and glamour on offer.

When I was growing up and trying the world out it wasn't long before I realised there was far more hypocrisy in the nightclubs than I ever saw in the churches. The drink, drugs, and loud laughter covered up so many broken hearts and lives. Hurting souls have to escape reality somehow. And then there were the wolves, of both sexes, who were just on the prowl looking for their next conquest to spice up their lives. I encountered so many people who hid behind masks.

'Selfies' Are Deceiving

I remember being on holiday in Portugal some years ago and talking with a young girl who was travelling alone. She really opened up to me and poured out her heart confessing how empty and lonely she was, she had no friends, no boyfriend ... and yet on her Facebook page, she was another person entirely, always posting 'selfies' of herself in exotic places, with exotic people, as though living a really exciting life. I could hardly take in the stark contrast.

In Genesis 6 we read what the spiritual climate of the world Enoch was living in was like. Verse 2 says that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose.

Angels had actually left heaven to mate with earthly women! The result was that the earth was becoming a breeding ground for physical giants who were like mighty supermen.

It was bad in those days; but what is it like in comparison today?

A New Morality

We have legalised LGBTQ+ alternative lifestyles, abortion, and pornography, and have illegal but rampant drug abuse, violence, paedophilia, and sex trafficking. I don't know whether angels are mating with women today, but I do know we are creating super-beings through artificial intelligence – and who knows where that will lead! Elon Musk has just implanted the first neuralink chip into a human being enabling them to control devices by thought. We are presently living in a very sick and evil world.

There may have been ungodly hybrid giants in Enoch's day, but from the very first day he had the revelation of the coming judgement, Enoch became a spiritual godly giant. This is what we read in the book of Jude:

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with 10,000 of his saints, to execute judgement upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of

all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against God.

Jude 1:14-15

He was a prophet of God and testified in the wicked world he lived in that it was possible to walk with God even though he was a married man with a large family. The Bible records that Enoch walked with God 300 years after the birth of Methuselah and had more sons and daughters afterwards. You'd have thought that Enoch would have refrained from having more children if such a pronouncement was made.

Family Life Is Tough

Some people look for ideal circumstances of seclusion and tranquillity to be able to concentrate on God. They complain it's too hard to walk with God surrounded by a house full of noisy kids. They're burdened with bills and responsibilities, have endless rows and disagreements, and so on. There are even fights over the children. Yet this is the very situation the majority of people find themselves in. This is called family life, and the Bible says that God sets the solitary in families. If you can't live a godly life in the middle of mayhem, where you have to exercise patience, forgiveness, mercy, and peacemaking on a daily basis, then I wonder what sort of godliness you really do have.

Be Safe In The Ark

In the middle of a crowded household, with all the responsibilities that go with it, Enoch lived a normal life yet developed and enjoyed his walk with God. He had a sex life, but still pleased God. He was not fearful about the future, he believed that if judgement came his family would be preserved if he walked with God and maintained a good testimony. We should all be concerned with this – that our family, children, and grandchildren, should be safe in the ark.

Enoch was a public man and a family man. There was no Bible to get instructions from, no commandments to refer to, or church to attend for encouragement, but he proved that any one of us can walk in close relationship with God **if** we have the same revelation he had.

Paul says in Hebrews:

By faith, Enoch was translated that he should not see death ... For before his translation he had this testimony – that he pleased God.

Hebrews 11:5-6

His testimony was his ‘Walk’, his ‘Lifestyle’. So, what is our testimony? What sort of lifestyles as Believers do we have? What do people really see in us?

Well, I know one thing for certain – without faith, it's impossible to please God. The secret of Enoch's personal walk with God was that not only did he have the revelation that the judgement of God was coming on the world and he would have to give an account for how he'd used or abused his gift of life, but he also believed the revelation God had given him, and acted accordingly. This was the same message John the Baptist and Jesus preached Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! If we really believe this message and are truly born of God we can change our lifestyle no matter what background we have come from.

Beyond Imagination

The rewards for obedience are beyond our imagination. Before the coming judgement Jesus will return to this earth and has promised his disciples that where he is, we shall be also. Enoch, the prophet, was the first man to experience this promise for he was translated – one day he just disappeared without a trace. Enoch wasn't living in the Garden of Eden, but the Bible says he walked with God. He started and must have continued doing this for 300 years after Methuselah was born. His lifestyle was consistent. The story goes that he went out for a walk one day, and God said, “Don't go home today Enoch, you're much nearer my home than yours, so come home with me.” And he was gone! Doesn't

that sound beautiful?

He was translated ... carried over or carried across. What does that mean? Well, God carried him across death. He did not see death. God picked him up, carried him over, and put him down on the other side. This hopefully is what's going to happen to us if we are still living when Jesus returns.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

What a thrilling thought!

Can you see the world trend? He's coming back soon. May God stir us all with the reality of that revelation so that we endeavour to do what Enoch did and walk with God.

Chapter 10

Being Angry With God

Many years ago when I was new to the ministry I was away working for God and left my two young kittens to be looked after by friends only to find on my return that one kitten was missing. A week later she was found in the garden, being eaten by maggots and we only recognised her by the little collar she was wearing. I was very upset, obviously, but more than that surprised that God would allow this to happen, especially as I was out of the country serving him. However, I was comforted by the fact I still had another kitten. A couple of years later, after my remaining cat had a litter of kittens, I took her to the vet to be neutered and was given a time to phone to see when she'd be ready to bring home. I rang, but as there was no news yet they told me to ring later. This message was repeated a couple of times until eventually, they said,

"I'm really sorry to have to tell you this, but your cat hasn't come round from the anaesthetic.

I don't know why, as this is something which only happens to one cat in 1,000. We're really sorry."

I Was Mad At God

That was two cats! And I was serving God! I couldn't understand why God would allow this to happen. Did I get angry? Yes, I did. In fact, I was so upset with God that I decided to ignore him so wouldn't read my Bible, or pray. I wanted to hurt him because he'd hurt me. Thank goodness God only allowed this silly attitude to continue for three days before he showed me how childish my behaviour was.

I've heard people say it's okay to be honest with God, be angry with him if that's how you feel, don't keep it bottled up! I suppose that's alright if you don't allow the sun to go down on your anger, as the Bible instructs, but you must come to an understanding with God quickly. We have to realise we're always going to experience times of bewilderment, disappointment, or grief in our lives, but just imagine how far some people can take it if they don't get their own way with God.

We read in the book of Jonah that when God instructed Jonah to go to Nineveh, which was 700 miles away from where he lived, he took a boat to Tarshish instead which was 2,000 miles in the opposite direction! Why would he do this when he was a prophet of God? Well, not everything

God tells us to do is going to be pleasant. We have to understand what this man was being asked to do.

The books of Nahum and Zephaniah describe what Nineveh was like in the days of Jonah. This city of Nineveh was bent on destroying any existence of God, and the dictator controlling it had marched forth plotting evil against the Lord as a wicked military strategist. They were arrogantly proud of their powerful, vast army. The Bible describes their chariots as racing madly upon the walls like bolts of lightning. This city was full of bloodshed, lies, sorcery, and witchcraft. They were a bunch of murderous, godless terrorists, and Jonah did not want to fulfil this God-given commission.

God Is Everywhere

When you want to get away from God you won't be content to walk slowly, you'll want to run as fast as you can to get as far away as possible. The problem is that we can't get away from God.

Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. For you have possessed my reins: you have

covered me in my mother's womb.

Psalms 139:7

How can you possibly hide from the very one who knew you in the womb?

But the thing that amazes me when reading the story of Jonah isn't the fact that he was in the belly of the whale and survived, carrying on to fulfil God's plan. No, the amazing thing was that he was asleep in the storm!

The Fright Of Our Lives

Years ago Maurice and I were on holiday in Malta and took a little boat trip from one harbour to another. As soon as we'd come out of the shelter of the harbour into the open waters the waves went up and down! Our little vessel bobbed about on the water like a bottle cork. I couldn't believe how scary it was. The crew were used to these waters and were even serving drinks and hot beverages, until they realised the passengers weren't comfortable. Sometimes I was staring up into the sky as the waves rose, and other times I was staring down into the water as the boat came down. I held tightly onto the boat literally fearing for my life! This was just choppy water as far as the crew were concerned but it made me wonder what on earth the disciples must have experienced when they begged Jesus to wake up from his sleep to help them because they were seasoned fishermen. If they were frightened

for their very lives how bad must that storm have really been?

Well, we know for a fact that Jesus was in God's perfect will so had no fear of the storm, but for anyone who's run away from God, like Jonah, the only way to sleep through a storm like the one he faced is because they have completely killed their conscience; or something around them has taken away from them the reality of what is really happening. Jonah was in a terrible place because he'd let the sun go down on his wrath and it was taking root in his heart. The leader of the ship came to Jonah in bewilderment wondering how he could sleep at such a time.

"Why don't you cry out to your God like we're doing?" He asked.

Jonah Wanted To Die

But then Jonah confessed he was actually running away from his God and the only way to stop the storm would be to throw him overboard.

What a solution! This was the first time in the book of Jonah that he said he wanted to die, and it wasn't the last time either. So he was thrown overboard, the storm ceased, and Jonah spent the next three days and nights in the belly of a whale.

After the whale vomited Jonah up on dry land, God started all over again by telling him to go to Nineveh.

So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

Jonah 3:3

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, "I pray you, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? That's why I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and would repent of the evil you were going to do. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." Then said the LORD, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Jonah 3:10

In Jonah 4, it mentions the word 'anger' four times in just eleven verses. This is one really angry preacher! Using a strong Hebrew verb here for being

displeased, the Holy Spirit indicates that Jonah was so upset he was trembling and quivering. On top of that, it says Jonah was 'exceedingly displeased', meaning 'great or large in magnitude and extent!' This was big-time displeasure! Jonah was nearly beside himself!

A Great Revival

How could a real Man of God like Jonah react to anything in such an out-of-control way? What had 'displeased' him so much? Well, God had upset Jonah! He was mad at God! God had forgiven the whole city of Nineveh, the Capital of Assyria, of all their sins and sent a wonderful revival. One that lasted many years too! Perhaps numerically this was the greatest revival in the whole of the Old Testament! The only problem was that Jonah did not want these bloodthirsty people spared!

So, Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

Jonah 4:5

This is the only time in this little book that Jonah is happy!

But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live". And God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the gourd?" And he said, "**I do well to be angry, even unto death!**"

Jonah 4:7

In the Hebrew this response of Jonah has the force of an expletive, he was so livid! Yet even after hearing Jonah's words God is full of understanding and takes time to explain his reasoning. If Jonah can be concerned about a plant, then surely God can be concerned about a city full of men, women, and children who are wicked simply because they have no knowledge of God. The book ends with a question.

Then said the LORD, "You have had pity on the gourd, for the which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons that can't discern between their right hand

and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Jonah 4:10

This thing with Nineveh was not about Jonah, it was all about God, but Jonah had lost sight of what God's purpose was. When he eventually did what he was supposed to do and prophesied that God would overthrow the city in 40 days, then God didn't, he took it personally. He'd prophesied in the name of the Lord but it hadn't come to pass, so he now had egg on his face, and to his mind, he'd been discredited. And it was all God's fault because Jonah knew God was full of mercy, that's why he hadn't wanted to go in the first place. There must have been some pride hidden inside of him that had never been exposed before.

We'll All Have To Give An Account

You know, if Jonah, who was a reputable prophet and servant of God, can behave like this when he's trying to run away from the call of God, can you imagine what it's going to be like for anyone else who feels as though God has disappointed them? It doesn't matter who we are, whether we're a big shot prophet who's well established in the ministry, or just one of God's two-bit, unknown servants, we're all going to have to stand before Jesus Christ to give an account for our words and deeds in this life, and this thought terrifies some people.

I remember a dear old lady who'd never managed to surrender her resentment and bitterness to God throughout her many years of being a Believer. She was in such physical pain at the end of her life that I asked if she wanted me to pray for Jesus to take her to be with himself. In sudden panic, she said, "No!" I couldn't understand why she'd prefer to continue suffering in constant agony rather than being freed from her old, pain-wracked body, so I asked her why not.

"I'm frightened", she said.

She was scared of facing Jesus knowing there was so much she could have put right, but hadn't.

Burn Up The Dross

That's what God's crucible is for, to get rid of our impurities so that we're not ashamed when we face Christ. Wouldn't it be great if every time we were put in the crucible and felt the heat applied we'd delight in the fact we were being purified? Oh, to be pure in heart so that in every situation we could see God at work in our lives; and instead of running away from the will of God, we'd run into it, rejoicing in God working out his purposes both in us and in the situations surrounding us?

You know, God could have used any of his prophets to go to Nineveh but he chose Jonah because there was more at stake here than a city full of ungodly people. God loved Jonah, but he

loved him too much to allow a root of bitterness to remain in his heart. Jonah could never deal with it if he wasn't aware of it so God arranged this situation to kill two birds with one stone – to deliver the citizens of Nineveh, but also to deliver his servant Jonah. Nobody likes getting exposed, it's truly painful because it touches the flesh. We have no idea what's in us until God puts his finger on the spot and we wince. We need to be put in the crucible and placed in the fire so that the dross can come to the surface, and this is never going to be a pleasant experience.

A Changed Man

I believe Jonah went home a changed man after his exposure and encounter with God. Jonah knew God was compassionate and full of mercy, and for God to share his heart and reason with Jonah the way he did I'm sure it didn't fall on deaf ears. These men written about in the Bible are just like us. They have the same passions as us, and the same sinful DNA as us. We all need our flesh dealt with. God didn't call the mighty, the strong, or the successful to serve him, he called the weak, the foolish, and the despised, because he wants the glory.

The Bible is such a wonderful book, but it takes real faith to truly believe what is written.

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

Chapter 11

Disaster or Destiny?

I'd like to share a bit about some of the traumatic experiences which we go through in life. Are they just disasters, or could they possibly be essential to help us reach our destiny? But first, let me tell you a little story.

There once was a wealthy lord who owned a very large piece of land. As this man looked out over the beautiful meadows watching the rabbits hopping through the luscious grass, bees and butterflies flitting amongst the buttercups and daisies, and admiring the birds and squirrels playing in vast trees, he had a vision. A vision of a magnificent estate comprising a mansion which housed stables and garages, set in acres of cultivated gardens filled with orchards, exotic trees and plants, rock gardens, brooks and bridges. He began to sketch his vision and showed it to an architect and landscape gardener who made blueprints to enable his vision to become a reality. Once the lord had agreed to their plans he contacted surveyors and builders who named their price and

gave dates when they could commence the work he had commissioned them to do.

Devastation

At last, the day dawned when the work would begin. The lord arrived on the scene late in the day to find heavy machinery and equipment already installed and operative, and the ground swarming with men hard at work. In only a few hours they'd completely devastated the former peace and tranquillity of his land. All wildlife had fled in terror as bulldozers had ripped through the fields digging up all the grass and flowers, and tearing out the trees. The place was a mess. These workmen seemed bent on destruction and didn't care in the slightest for anything which he had once considered beautiful in its natural state.

Day after day the land became more ravaged. Instead of dew and rain-filled grassland, the ground was a muddy bog, stripped of colour. Had the Lord made a costly mistake? Could anything good come out of this devastation?

Of course! With time things changed. After the tearing down, came the building up. The work was intense and thorough, but after months of hard labour, the workforce produced the desired result and the lord was well satisfied. The wild life returned to the area to enjoy more pleasures than they had ever experienced before, as there were now streams

and ponds to splash about in. The lord was able to live in the mansion and enjoy his dream. Yes, it was well worth all his effort.

It doesn't matter what area in life you're trying to make your mark, whether it's show business, athletics, in fact in any field at all, if you want to become successful you have to pay your dues. There are no shortcuts.

The Price Of A Wife

I find it heartbreaking to read the story of Joseph in the Bible. His crime was that he was the longed-for son of his father's favourite wife. Although Jacob had other wives, Rachel was his true love. For fourteen long years, he'd worked for her father, Laban, who was the most cunning, greedy man he'd ever had the misfortune to know, for the sole purpose of purchasing the right to marry Laban's daughter. Yet, when she finally became his, fourteen years of hard labour seemed like nothing because his love for her was so great. Rachel watched in agony as her older sister Leah, who was also Jacob's wife, produced six sons for Jacob, whilst she was barren. Years later God finally blessed her and she bore Jacob a son, Joseph. Jacob couldn't hide his loving feelings for this child because he'd come from his beloved Rachel.

You'd think that Jacob's ten other sons would have doted on this little boy who was the son of

Jacob's old age, and the baby of the family, but they were peevish and hated the fact that their father showed Joseph favouritism. The Bible records that the problem the Pharisees had with Jesus was envy. They couldn't stand the fact that he was more popular than they were, so they plotted to have him crucified.

Sold For Filthy Lucre

These ten brothers envied Joseph so much that they too 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. They reasoned that by killing him they wouldn't have any material gain, so decided to sell him as a slave for twenty pieces of silver, 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 is 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 whom 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 to sleep with her he made it very plain 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, however, was furious when she was rebuffed. The ardent desire she previously had for him turned swiftly to anger, then to hatred – in fact, she hated him so much that she wanted to destroy him so declared he'd raped her and his boss, her husband, had him flung into prison.

What Has Gone Wrong?

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 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 felt 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 the keeper of the prison recognised God's favour upon him and put him in charge of all the other prisoners. He didn't concern himself with anything Joseph did because the Lord was with Joseph.

From Prison to Prime Minister

Joseph must have felt completely alone and forgotten. What a shock when 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 to buy land, livestock, and people in exchange for grain.

But notice Joseph's attitude when faced with his brothers. He could have done so much damage to 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. Although it had not yet been written, he could have quoted the scripture, 'All things work together for good, for those who love God, the called according to his purpose.' He even said to his brothers, 'You meant it for harm, but God meant it for good.' Because Joseph did not fight or resist the pressure, God was able to perfect him so that not only his family were saved from certain death, but the whole of Egypt and many other nations round about.

A New Creature

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 old sinful nature and make brand new men or women out of them fashioned like unto his precious and obedient son, Jesus the Christ.

We must always remember that 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 his 'blueprint', nor have we had the vision of what our lives are destined to become. Only God knows that. But I am absolutely certain

that if we hold on in faith and allow God to have his perfect way in our lives, without complaint or resistance, God won't be the only one pleased with the result, I'm sure that we also will be delighted with what we can become in this life by God's grace.

Chapter 12

Make God Smile

In 2006 my little family travelled on a plane together for the very first time. I'd found some really cheap £20 return tickets so booked them as a birthday treat for Izaac, my younger son, who was ten years old on the very day we were due to travel. Nathan had been on planes many times as a baby, but being thirteen years old now he had no recollection of what it was like. Izaac, and Tamar who was only six, were so full of anticipation that they almost burst with excitement. We were only going on a day trip to see some relations in Holland, but it was the way they were travelling that was the thrill of the day.

We were ushered onto the plane first because we were a family with young children and were able to choose our own seats. We got right near the front with a good view out of the window on both sides of the plane. Izaac sat at one window seat with his brother and Dad sitting beside him, and Tamar sat at the window seat on the opposite side with me

sitting beside her.

The jet engines roared as we sped down the runway making their eyes widen in expectation; and the thrill of the take-off, which caused funny feelings in their tummies, set them off giggling with delight, making the passengers sitting close by smile indulgently.

Tamar Needed The Toilet

Once we were airborne and riding on top of the clouds there was little to see so I dug into my bag to produce chocolate muffins and drinks to add to their enjoyment. It was then that Tamar announced that she needed the toilet. No problem, there were facilities on board so I took her to use them. She was amazed at the tiny bathroom which we both squeezed into and, taking in all her surroundings, happily relieved herself.

We settled down to the flight which only took one hour but just before we were about to land Tamar declared that she needed the toilet again. I knew it was the novelty that really made her want to go so told her to wait until we had landed. Once on the ground, the air hostess told her she could now use the toilet as the other passengers were leaving the plane. Tamar was determined that she could go on her own so I let her. She took ages. Maurice and the boys had left the plane with the other passengers thinking that we wouldn't be long, but as the

minutes passed they got concerned and came back for us. Then the cockpit door opened and the pilot appeared. He was about to bolt his door open but I quickly told him that if he did so he would trap my little girl inside the toilet.

A Birthday Treat

Just then Tamar opened her door and looked up at the pilot. She was agog. She'd never been so close to a real pilot before and started asking him all sorts of questions. Izaac too began to quiz him. Then to my amazement, the pilot asked the kids if they'd ever been inside the cockpit of a plane. They said this was the very first time they'd even been on a plane, so he took them both inside the cockpit telling them to sit down in the pilot and co-pilot seats. The kids could hardly contain their excitement. This was such a wonderful experience for them, a wonderful birthday present for Izaac. The pilot showed them what the knobs and switches did, and even allowed them to press certain ones which made the plane do all sorts of tricks. As a Mum, I just watched in thankfulness to God, my heart so full and satisfied knowing that God had done this to bless my children even more than they already were.

We met our relations and the hours quickly passed. We were soon back at the airport and even managed to secure the very same seats for our homeward journey. This time the children fastened

their own seat belts acting like seasoned travellers. Once riding above the clouds Tamar announced that she wanted to go to the toilet, saying,

“It’s all right Mummy, I can go on my own”.

Innocent Antics

She left the seat, walked inside the little room, and locked the door behind her. Or thought she did! A few moments later the door slowly opened to reveal Tamar’s bare bottom, like a full moon, sticking out as she bent to pull her trousers and underwear down. Obviously, she must have turned to sit on the toilet seat because the next thing we all saw was her hand reaching out to pull the door closed. The passengers in the front few rows could see everything that was going on and, looking over to me, began chuckling at her innocent antics.

A couple of minutes later a man some rows behind us walked down the aisle to use the toilet not knowing Tamar was occupying it. He put his hand on the handle and pulled open the door, and to his surprise saw Tamar sitting on her little throne. She hadn’t locked the door properly – again! He closed the door quickly as the front passengers, along with myself, all burst out laughing. He went quite red with embarrassment, but it was really rather sweet and very funny. Eventually, Tamar emerged from the toilet and was bemused at the indulgent smiles of the nearby passenger, that is until I told

her what had happened. Now it was her turn to be embarrassed and fall about laughing.

An Adventure

You know, that trip was a highlight for me, etched in my memory. My kids were so excited to be going on this journey. They had no burdens concerning finance for transport or food. They saw it as an adventure, stepping out into the unknown. And I got a really big kick out of seeing their delight. The Bible says:

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created.

Revelation 4:11

I'd really put effort into that treat for the kids. They could have been travel sick and not enjoyed it at all, but I was hoping it would be a wonderful experience for them all so, in actual fact, I'd done it ultimately for my own pleasure. When God made the heavens, the earth, and mankind, he looked at it all and said, "Wow, it's very good!" God created all things and we benefit from everything he has created for us, but ultimately he did it all for his own pleasure.

I often think about people in the Bible and wonder how they must have felt on their faith

journey. Take for instance the time when Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes. Jesus had given each of the twelve disciples just a portion of these loaves and fishes, not much, and then told them to feed the people. How did the disciples feel when they were walking amongst the thousands distributing their tiny portions? It must have seemed stupid to them at first, but as they kept giving out what was in their hand never lessened. They were watching a miracle take place in their very hands, right before their eyes! How incredible is that! How must Jesus have felt watching the amazement on their faces?

Walking On Water

And then there's Peter who, when he saw Jesus walking on the water, shouted out, saying,

"If that's you, Lord Jesus, bid me come to you!"

And when Jesus shouted back telling him to come he sat on the edge of the boat, swung his legs over the side, and put his feet down. But instead of his feet sinking into the water, they stood on the water. On firm, solid water. Incredible! Amazing! He was so thrilled he began to walk towards Jesus, doing something physically impossible in a totally supernatural way!

How must Peter have felt? Yes, I know he took his eyes off Jesus and after looking at the swirling waters began to sink, but Jesus lifted him up, and the Bible says they both walked back to the boat

... they walked on water for goodness sake! How exciting must that have been for both of them!

Ready To Die

What a terrible trial Daniel went through when, after being arrested for disobeying the government, he was thrown into a pit full of hungry lions. But how must he have felt when not one of them harmed him? He was ready to die for his faith but instead witnessed a miracle all night long. What must that have done for his faith in Almighty God? Can you imagine being in a situation like that? He went into that pit offering himself up to God's will and saw everything reversed. When he was released the next morning the king threw his accusers into the pit instead, showing everyone just how hungry those lions had been because they ate up the men thrown in, bones and all, before their bodies had even touched the ground. How do you think Daniel felt after experiencing that? What sort of pleasure must God have felt when even the king of Babylon, after witnessing this incredible miracle, acknowledged that our God, Jehovah, was the real God?

Sometimes God actually places us in dangerous circumstances just so we have an opportunity to see how real he truly is. When I first started visiting Africa I wasn't doing any preaching, I was just supporting my husband. To be honest, I felt a bit guilty about it

as, living by faith, and the flights being so expensive, I wondered whether I should just stay at home and support him in prayer. We went to Nigeria and our Nigerian friend Surakat came with his wife and two daughters to collect us from the airport. Maurice sat in the front passenger seat and I sat in the back of the small vehicle with Surakat's family.

Near-Fatal Accident

Surakat stopped on the homeward journey to buy pineapples so Maurice got out with him leaving us girls in the car. They'd only been gone for a couple of minutes when I noticed a huge 10-ton wagon was reversing and heading straight for our vehicle. There was a lot of commotion on the busy street as people tried to get the driver's attention telling him to stop. A man at the rear of this huge wagon was even instinctively trying to push it away from our car, getting his hand squashed in the process, as the left-hand corner of the wagon came straight through the rear passenger window of our car, right where I was sitting. I had nowhere to move. I was trapped by the other passengers. I was going to get crushed.

As I shut my eyes tightly I instinctively put my hand up to protect my face, but the wagon stopped and began to move forwards. With great concern. Surakat ran to open the rear door to release me, and as I looked down I saw glass everywhere. His

youngest daughter sitting beside me looked at my hand and then pointed to my wristwatch ... the glass was smashed! The reversing wagon had smashed the glass in my wristwatch when I put my hand up to protect my face! I was that close to certain death!

I Was Excited

Suddenly I felt a surge of adrenaline rush through my body. God had just saved my life! I jumped out of the car shouting, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! I know I'm meant to be here!" Talk about being excited! I was so thrilled by this God-incident that I'm absolutely certain God must have been looking down on the scene getting real pleasure from my reaction.

When was the last time you really enjoyed God? When was the last time he gave you an opportunity to do something or go somewhere, and you saw it as a big adventure?

Maurice and I have travelled around the world for many years now. We've seen some amazing sights, experienced very different cultures, and met many people with diverse characters. We've been in scary predicaments and seen God deliver us from dangerous situations. Yes, God's always sent someone or something to help us just at the right time. It's been a very exciting journey.
Don't Rob God Of The Pleasure

You know, the time you qualify for a miracle is when you're at your most vulnerable when you're in your worst predicament. We miss so much because we grumble and complain when we're in these situations, we don't realise God's placed us there to test how much we've grown. And because we don't see God in all our circumstances we rob him of so much pleasure. We don't truly believe Paul's statement that ... 'All things work together for good, for those who love God, the called according to his purpose.'

Don't allow yourself to be robbed of enjoying seeing all those exciting miracles and silver linings. Jesus said, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Yes, if you have a pure heart you'll see God in every single situation whether good or bad. So let's learn to trust in the Lord because if we do we'll enjoy life rather than endure life.

Have a little more faith because God rewards those who trust him. Seeing what God is able to do brings such joy, and our delight in the Lord makes God smile.

Chapter 13

Willing Sacrifice

I'm one of those strange people who actually used to love working for a living. I didn't care what I did, and I've gone to both extremes from working in a supermarket on the tills to being a personal assistant to Managing Directors. My fulfilment came from meeting different people and getting a salary each month which gave me the independent means to do what I really wanted to do. And because I was at one time employed by a secretarial agency I had the opportunity to work in lots of different firms where often I was offered full-time employment, but because I loved variety I invariably refused – that is until I found something really exciting. That's how I landed my job at an advertising agency. This was the most exciting job I'd encountered, and during the time I worked there my pastor started preaching radical Discipleship from the Sermon On The Mount which absolutely transformed me. God blessed me so much that a mini-revival broke out in the firm and I started holding Bible studies and prayer meetings

with some of the employees during the lunch breaks.

But just as I was at the peak of this exhilarating period in my life God told me to leave my job to work full time for him. I remember sharing with my pastor what God had said and he got really excited as I was already working for him as the church secretary at the weekends.

"Go for it! You're single, you've got nothing to lose."

But when I told him the problems having no income would cause me, like not being able to pay my rent or keep my car, he just fobbed it off by saying,

"What are you worrying about? If God's called you then he'll provide. But you'll never prove your calling unless you put it to the test and step out in faith."

At twenty-six years old I decided to go for it. I gave my notice at work and watched God work in my circumstances. Now I met with the pastor more regularly, and what a difference that made to me spiritually. I was breathing, living, eating, and sleeping God from morning till night, and my relationship with him grew stronger and stronger.

I worked with the pastor during the day, provided the music and led the singing for every church meeting, and then practised, performed, and also recorded albums with the church band I was in. We held coffee mornings in the church twice a week where we relayed over and over again the Sunday

sermon so that people who wandered in could hear the message whilst enjoying a cuppa and were able to chat with them about God. My pastor decided to blitz the whole of Manchester with leaflets advertising the fact that God was real and could answer prayer, so twice a week I'd organise and take out a van load of church members to put these leaflets through house letter boxes, then we'd stop off for soup and prayer at another church members house at lunch-time before continuing our leaflet distribution in the afternoon. Wow, life was so different.

Nothing to Lose

My pastor had said, "Go for it! You're single, you've got nothing to lose," but he was completely wrong. There was much for me to lose, and they were all things I hadn't considered when I handed in my notice.

For one thing, when I gave up secular employment I gave up my status. When working as a personal assistant to the senior surveyor in the property development company I was in quite a high position of authority being regularly wined and dined by clients. In secular employment I had value. When offered this position I was told that because I was representing the company I'd receive a high salary as I was expected to dress well. My value also increased tremendously as a jingle singer because I could earn in just a couple of days what

I'd normally earn in a whole month. But now I was employed by God I couldn't afford to go out on clothes shopping sprees, in fact, because I wasn't in an office anymore, nor in the recording studios singing jingles and rubbing shoulders with famous personalities, there was nobody to impress anymore so I had no need of the clothes I already had!

I Gave Up My Independence

When I gave up my flat I gave up my independence. The couple housing me were financially challenged themselves so I didn't feel at liberty to have the heating on as long as I would have done in my own flat knowing how expensive it was. Also because I relied on them now for my food each day I couldn't be fussy, so had to alter my eating habits to fit in with them, which made me feel deprived. Yes, I had to give up my flat. Yes, I had to give up my car. Yes, it hurt to have my independence stripped away when God provided others to house me and bear my burdens. Believe me, you have no idea how much pride and ego you have until God begins to strip you. Yet there was a joy in all of this sacrifice. I'd gained far more than I'd lost. I was doing something which I felt was eternally valuable for others as well as myself. My whole life was purposeful.

But three years down the line God spoke to me and told me to stop doing everything I was doing

in the church. Some would question this and say; Would God say a thing like that? Well, that's exactly what I thought! And when I shared it with my pastor that's exactly what he thought too! But God made it very clear. So I came off the platform where I'd been planted for fifteen years, to sit in the pews like everyone else. My pastor was convinced this was only temporary so never made any announcement as to why I'd stepped down. Consequently, people drew their own conclusions, and that was very revealing.

Unbeknown to me a number of members had been very envious of my preferential treatment and rumours started flying around that I was being disciplined for some disgraceful conduct. I was so hurt that within six months I was out of the church altogether, and one of the rumours that followed me was that I'd left the church to have an abortion! So now I'd lost my reputation as well!

I left my church, I left my pastor, and after I'd found a job I left the couple supporting me to live once more in an apartment.

I felt so crushed that I didn't want anything to do with church again. It seemed the time I was trying my hardest to be a committed Christian was the time I was criticised the most. But thank God it didn't take me long to realise that I had only fallen out with carnal Christians, I hadn't fallen out with God. Before this experience, I'd always thought of God and the church as being inseparable, but God

was now showing me that was not true at all.

Some time after I'd left my home church I attended a prayer meeting in another church. The congregation sang a song together with fervour: "Speak, O Lord, speak to me. Speak and I'll be quick to answer Thee". And as they were singing God showed me a vision:

"In the vision, whilst I was still seated in the congregation, I heard an earth-shattering, thundering voice call to the people telling them to come outside. It was so real that I opened my eyes to see if anyone else had heard the voice, but they all had their eyes shut, their heads bowed, and nobody made a move. I closed my eyes and again heard the voice. I knew now that God was talking. The voice was so strong and powerful that I was afraid to disobey so, in my vision, I saw myself get out of my seat and leave the building.

Once outside the church doors., I looked around surprised to note that nobody else had left their seats. The other people in the congregation (still in the vision) remained seated in their comfortable seats and carried on singing and praying. I wondered what was going on so asked the Lord if this was really necessary. The thundering voice told me to walk without any explanation, and again I felt afraid to disobey so I walked.

I walked for a while then came to the edge of the town. The pavement had ceased so I continued to walk across fields compelled to carry on walking. I came to the foot of a mountain and expected God to

tell me why he had called me from the church. I asked the Lord again if this was really necessary, but there was no voice, God didn't answer this time, I just had the compulsion to continue, and the fear to disobey, so I began my journey up the mountain.

I Was All Alone

It was beginning to get dusky. I looked at my watch and noticed that it was time for the people to be coming out of church so looked back to where I'd come from. As I was part way up the mountain I could look down and see the people chatting to each other before making their way to their individual homes. I thought about my own home and would have loved to be doing the same. I was completely alone and would have welcomed the company of some of the other saints from the church. Again I asked if this was really necessary, but the Lord called me on.

It was getting quite cold now and as I began to climb higher I looked down to see the church members sitting in their nice warm houses by their fires, drinking hot beverages, and eating supper. My stomach began to growl as it felt deprived of the comforts it was used to, but still, I was pushed on to continue my journey. I climbed higher and higher until the grass no longer grew and I had to walk on rough rocks. I hadn't been prepared for this climb so the flimsy shoes I wore began to fall apart. It wasn't long before they'd broken off completely and I was

forced to walk without them.

Darkness fell, I had no torch so couldn't see clearly. I was cold, hungry, lonely, and very tired. I looked down below and saw the lights on in the houses. I watched as people began to take off their dressing gowns and slippers then slip between the fresh, clean sheets of their comfortable beds in their nice warm houses, and longed to be doing the same. I asked the Lord again if this was really necessary, but I'd already heard God's voice and was afraid to disobey, so I wearily carried on my way.

I Knew What Was Expected Of Me

It seemed like the journey took forever but at last, I reached the top of the mountain. In the darkness, I saw the outline of an altar, a stone slab erected on some smaller stones. My heart began to pound. Instinctively I knew what was expected of me and shrank away in terror. As I crouched on the ground afraid to move, I heard the song I'd sung in the church that evening ring out in my ears: "Speak O Lord, speak to me. Speak and I'll be quick to answer Thee." I was faced with the starkness of my own words. Is that all they were – words? Or did I really mean what I sang?

At last, I edged my way towards the altar and, with tears in my eyes, lay down upon it. Nothing happened. I looked around the base of the altar, saw a knife, and then the awful realisation hit me. God

expected me to kill myself. "Oh God," I cried from the depth of my soul, "Is this really necessary?" The voice didn't thunder out a command like I'd heard in the church, but though it was soft and gentle it still carried the same weight, and I feared to disobey. My spirit was willing but my flesh kicked and screamed. With all my heart I wanted to serve God but my physical body rejected the very thought of pain. I cried out to God for help and then plunged the knife into myself.

It was then that I seemed to look from outside my body at what was happening. As the knife killed my flesh, so it released my spirit. My body lay prostrate on the altar, but my spirit rose as light as a feather. I watched as my spirit began to skip and dance upon the mountaintop. My spirit wasn't affected by the cold, nor did it feel hunger. These feelings could only be experienced by my flesh. But once my flesh had been put to death my spirit was free to serve God with complete abandonment.

I tripped down the mountain back to my home but had been transformed. I lived my life among others, but was totally different from them, with a brand new focus. I realised why the journey had been necessary. I had to crucify the flesh in order to live to God."

Sacrifice is so worth it. Paul the apostle made great sacrifices and endured great persecutions for preaching the gospel. And he did it willingly. Paul said: I've held forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither

laboured in vain. Yes, and if I **be offered upon the sacrifice** and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

Philippians 2:16

For I **am now ready to be offered** (*martyred*), and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6

To make a sacrifice means you're going to have to give up something very valuable to you personally.

If the reason you're sacrificing is because you're trying to escape from something, or from somewhere, then it's not a sacrifice at all because you're glad to be free of it. It isn't costing you anything.

But if it's costing you dearly, and yet you're giving it up willingly from your heart, that is a precious offering to God, giving off a sweet-smelling savour, and he is well pleased.

Chapter 14

Don't Tempt God

Do you remember the account of Jesus being driven into the wilderness by the Spirit of God to be tempted by? This was one of Satan's temptations and the verse Jesus quoted as his answer:

Then the devil took him up into the holy city, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If you be the Son of God, cast yourself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.

Matthew 4:5-7

The actual verse in Deuteronomy which Jesus used said this:

You shall not tempt the LORD your God, as you tempted him in Massah.

Deuteronomy 6:16

How did the Israelites tempt God in Massah? Well, let's look at the account. It's in Exodus.

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why are you chiding with me? Why do you tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Why is it that you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with you of the elders of Israel; and your rod, wherewith you smote the river, take in your hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because

they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

Exodus 17:1-7

So why did Jesus use this scripture? Well, the closing shot from the children of Israel was – “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

Let's have a look at the events leading up to this incident.

Exodus chapter 14 details the way the Israelites miraculously crossed the Red Sea, and how all their Egyptian enemies who were chasing after them were drowned.

Chapter 15 says they came to the waters of Marah but the waters were too bitter to drink. So, after complaining and murmuring against Moses because they were thirsty, God healed the waters and made them sweet, providing them with drink.

Chapter 16 tells how God provided the Israelites with Manna, angel's food, when they complained of being hungry; promising them it would continually be there every morning for them (except the Sabbath day of course) during their time in the wilderness. They would always be provided with food.

In Chapter 17 the Israelites were again thirsty and accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt just so that they could die in the wilderness. They were so angry at Moses that they were ready to stone him. God did give them water – out of a rock! But

Moses called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

A Grumbling People

You know, these Israelites had some nerve to say: “Is the LORD among us, or not?” That must have been so insulting to God – like slapping him in the face. After all that he'd done for them, all the miracles he'd performed to release them from the iron grip of Pharaoh. They'd been slaves in Egypt for 400 years but now they were travelling through the desert with all the wealth of Egypt, having spoiled them before they left. God had bent over backwards to prove his love for these people. But now, when they faced an upset, a difficulty, a disappointment, they didn't only grumble and complain, but they were ready to stone Moses and go back to where they'd come from, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” Of course he was amongst them, any fool could see that when reading the story.

A couple of years ago I was going through a difficult time with my daughter and during one of her intense moments she looked at me with real rebellion and said, “You've never loved me!”

Well, only a mother who's experienced something similar could understand how I felt at that moment. I was cut to the core. I felt as though she'd

stabbed me in the heart with a knife. I couldn't even continue conversing with her and fled the room. I bawled my eyes out for a couple of hours because of what she'd said. That's the only time she's ever made me cry, but those words hurt for weeks.

What an accusation! If only she knew how much I loved her.

What an accusation to say, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" Only God knew how much he loved them.

Jesus Needed The Test

When tempted by Satan in the wilderness Jesus would never have jumped off the pinnacle of the temple to prove whether God was with him or not. For 30 years this man, who had never sinned once, had experienced such an intimate relationship with God that even at his weakest moment would not let Satan get into his mind. He was hungry, yes; he was thirsty, yes; he was in the middle of the wilderness, yes; but he knew God could deal with the situation just as he had done with the Israelites. And he wasn't disappointed because God sent the angels to minister to him when he'd come through his test.

God has to test us to find out what's in our hearts because we would never know, and neither would God, unless he allowed us to go through times of testing, disappointment, and hardship. It's important for us to get these things ironed out. God

can't fulfil his design for our lives unless we pass our tests.

A Life Changing Experience

I've just heard an incredible testimony of a young man who, in 1971, went to preach in Vietnam and a revival broke out. He was with a young interpreter who was only 17 years old at the time. They travelled by helicopter, gunships and transport planes, and sometimes by motorbikes, taking great risks with their lives. At the end of his time in Vietnam the young preacher, who was also 17 years old himself, said to his interpreter, "I don't know whether I'll see you again, but I just want you to know this has been a life-changing experience for me."

In 1988 the preacher was in a hotel room in Vancouver, British Columbia, when he received a phone call from a young interpreter who was at that time in California, who said,

"After you left and the Vietcong took over, I was one of the first few they arrested because they knew I worked with the American troops as an interpreter, and they knew about everything I did with you. They put me into prison saying I was a CIA operative even though I told them I was just interpreting for them because my English was good. They wouldn't let him read anything in English, only French and Vietnamese – Marx and Engels."

They were indoctrinating him with Marxism and Communism, with no English whatsoever, and it started to get to him. Months and months went by with all the indoctrination and finally, he came to the realisation that he was through with Christianity, he didn't believe all he used to believe anymore. They had broken him. He decided that the next morning he would not pray ever again.

A Rare Find

After he awoke the next morning the commanding officer came to him and said, "You're going to clean the latrines today." The latrines there were awful. You had to put something over your mouth and nose to try not to breathe the stench in, it was filthy in that prison. He started sloshing around cleaning it and he came to a tin with paper that had excrement in it which he was meant to dump. But as he was dumping it he noticed that one of the papers looked like it was written in English. He quickly turned around, hosed it off, and put it into his hip pocket. He went back to his cell and, late at night when everybody was asleep, he pulled out the piece of paper whilst under his mosquito net, and on the top right-hand corner it read: Romans Chapter 8. And he started reading ... "And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, for what shall separate us from the love of God, shall things present... and so on."

God Is Faithful

He burst out crying. He was afraid he'd awaken everybody. He cried so hard and put that paper against his face and said, "God, you did not let me go 24 hours without letting me know you were here!" He woke up the next morning and asked the Commanding Officer if he could clean the latrines again today? He found out somebody had given the Commanding Officer a Bible, and he was tearing out pages from the Bible to use as toilet paper. The young interpreter was washing them and using them to have his devotions every night.

Finally, they released him. He got out and decided he was going to build a boat with one of the high officers helping him, and about 52 of the men were going to escape with him. It was just a matter of days before they were going to set sail when four Vietcong came and knocked on his door.

They said, "Are you trying to escape from here?"

He said, "No!"

They said, "Are you telling us the truth?"

He said, "Yes!"

And they left.

He got on his knees saying, "God, forgive me for lying," then prayed a prayer that he hoped would never be answered.

"Lord, if you really want me to tell them the

truth, let them come back again.”

Telling The Truth

Hours before they were to depart the Vietcong came, armed to the teeth, got a hold of him by the collar and rammed him up against the wall.

“You're lying! You're trying to escape, aren't you?”

He said, “Yes, with 52 others. Are you going to put me behind bars again?”

They said, “No, we want to go with you.”

Four of the Vietcong came on board. They were on the high seas and would have capsized in a storm, but these four Vietcong had mariner skills and took them all to safety in Thailand where the young interpreter was allowed to be a refugee whilst on his way to the USA, which he finally reached and was able to do his business degree in Management.

Do you ever question in your heart ... “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

Jesus said, “It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”

If you are following Jesus, then keep his commandments, and stop that foolish questioning. Of course, he's with you. He's just testing you to see whether you have faith in him.

Chapter 15

Why Did My Kids Backslide?

Do you ever come across verses in the bible which are confusing? I do. And to be honest, I quite like it when I have to stop and think, because, when I've found the answer, it seems to do something in my heart. I'd like to share a scripture which has puzzled me for a long time, and it's this one:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

It puzzled me because this was written by Solomon, the son of King David whom God said he loved, the very son who said he loved God. God actually visited him in a dream when he first became king and told him to ask for anything he wanted and it would be granted. Solomon asked for wisdom so he could rule the kingdom wisely like his father David had done, and God was so pleased with this

request that he not only granted him wisdom, but gave him other blessings besides. Solomon started off so well and was famous for his unique wisdom. Kings, queens, and dignitaries from many far-off countries would visit his kingdom to see what he'd achieved during his reign and were amazed at his greatness. Yet Solomon backslid in later life and did all the things God specifically told him not to, ending up in witchcraft, and as you well know those who are in the Masons and practice the occult adhere to the writings of Solomon. How could Solomon, of all people, backslide?

An Ideal Environment

I brought my children up in a really godly environment, I even sent them to a Christian school where they were taught by born-again Believers, then spent some years home-schooling them. We didn't have a television, they watched videos we deemed safe which didn't contain any witchcraft, swearing, or sex. All our friends were godly and we talked about wholesome things.

But the children grew up. They went to secular schools aged 14 to get their GCSEs and were suddenly exposed to the world's mindset. Maurice and I had spent years preparing our kids for God but within a matter of weeks, we saw dramatic changes in their attitudes, their dress, and their language.

A Different Culture

We talked to them about their vocabulary, but they explained that when using four-letter words it had nothing to do with sexual acts in their minds. They were simply using adjectives to add colour to what they were saying, or it was just a way to express more strongly their feelings of anger. This was how they communicated with their peers as they all used the same language. And when I asked whether they were concerned about offending God they came back with scientific answers which even questioned the very existence of God! I remember one of my sons saying that if Maurice and I had been Muslims then they also would have been Muslims because that's how we'd have brought them up, we just happened to be Christians so we brought them up that way. They'd believed in God because we did, and that was all they knew. But once they'd ventured out into the world they realised there were more options and they wanted to explore things for themselves.

This was heartbreaking for us as parents and we were at our wit's end wondering how to address the situation. But God was so good and showed us that we had given the children to him. We'd poured our love of God, our knowledge of God, and the wisdom of God into them for years ... but we were sharing our God with them, he wasn't theirs. They had to have a personal revelation of God if they

were going to have a personal relationship with him. There's no such thing as a second-generation Believer. God doesn't have grandchildren, he only has children. We all have to be fathered by him. But we need to understand how difficult it is for our children to give their lives to God. Discipleship is so costly and there's too much to give up. This present evil world has so many enticing pleasures of sin for a season which are compelling temptations, especially for young people. They're running away as fast and as far as possible from God. But what we can be truly thankful for is the fact that our children know where to go when they're desperate. They have a knowledge of God to fall back on.

A Good Start in Life

I personally think I gave my children a great start in life. They had all the things I never had, like family holidays, affection, encouragement and praise. We live in a big house with loads of space, and because we ran a ministry they had access to computers from a young age and learned skills like desktop publishing and could use the recording studio to create their own music and videos. But I've come to realise that it doesn't matter where we've come from, or what our beginnings were, we all have to find God for ourselves.

You see, we've been given something very special and sacred which can also be self-destructive,

and that's 'free will'. We all make our own choices, and at the end will have to give an account for those choices to an Almighty God. He can be either our saviour or our judge – that too is our very own choice.

The Father of Faith

In the ancient world of Abraham, religion in Babylonia at that time was polytheism of the grossest type as more than 300 distinct gods were worshipped. If Abraham had thought much about gods he would have held these beliefs for half his life. Yet this man ended up as the 'Father of Faith' and the Friend of God.

Some time ago I edited many of Maurice's father's sermons. He's dead now, but he left a legacy of teaching which transformed our lives and we want to share it world-wide. One of the sermons shed quite a bit of light on that verse Solomon wrote as it was concerning something Jesus said in the gospel of John.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:26

We've had many teachers throughout life – parents, school teachers, bosses, and we've all had to

study many things. I know the difficulty of studying to pass exams at school, college, and even driving, it was hard work and I couldn't always retain the information in my memory. But if the Holy Ghost, which is the very spirit of God himself, does the teaching, then this will not only go into our heart and spirit, it will take root. We won't be able to shift it. Not only will he teach us, but he'll also cause us to remember what he's taught no matter how long ago the lesson was. The Holy Ghost presses that search button on our spiritual computer and brings to the forefront of our mind what Jesus told us just when we need it. That's amazing!

Sealed With The Holy Ghost

Paul says in Ephesians 1:13 that if we've been predestined according to the purpose of God, and have trusted in him after we heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation; that after we believed in him, we were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. When you seal something it means nothing can get out. Meaning – God in, we're sealed with the Holy Spirit, now there's no way for God to get out. What a glorious promise! Praise the wonderful name of the Lord!

I wasn't brought up in a Christian home, I actually attended Children's Meetings at the local Brethren Church when I was around six years old and heard the fantastic stories of Noah and the Ark;

Daniel in the lion's den; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace; David and Goliath; Jesus walking on water, and so much more, and the Holy Spirit captured my imagination. I was enraptured and believed every word spoken, and from that moment on was sealed with the Holy Spirit. What had gone into my spirit couldn't escape.

There Are No Perfect Conditions

So, don't beat yourself up by asking where you went wrong bringing up your children. I've come to realise that there are no perfect conditions whether good or bad. I want to encourage you because in actual fact I've seen more true saints of God from bad backgrounds than good ones.

Pray that the Holy Spirit teaches your kids, because if he's doing the teaching then none of them can escape.

Chapter 16

Trusting God During the Pruning

There are many scriptures in the bible which liken people to trees, and here's one of them. I'm quoting from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree can't bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.

Matthew 7:17-20

There are key words in this verse, and one is the word 'every'.

Every tree will be tested, with no exceptions. Tested for what? To see whether it's borne fruit.

'Fruit' is another keyword. What is fruit?

Well, it's the character of Christ manifested in

our lives.

If the tree is corrupt or bad, it's cut down and burned because if it's not dealt with the corruption will spread to other nearby trees and they'll also become bad.

Good trees don't damage bad trees, but bad trees damage good trees.

But what if we're a good tree, doing well and bearing fruit?

Well, we'll be pruned, cut back. Why? So that we'll be even more fruitful because becoming perfect is a long process.

But the scary part of this passage is this.

Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Matthew 7:19

There are only two alternatives: pruning or burning. Either way, everyone's work is going to be tested.

So, what is fire? Fire is just another facet of God's character. Hebrews 12:29 says 'Our God is a consuming fire'. Fire is what God uses for his ultimate judgement, and we escape the ultimate judgement of the lake of fire by becoming children of God. But we can also avoid the pain of 'suffering loss' in the purging, testing fire, by building with the right materials: gold, silver, and precious stones – and allowing our minds to be transformed so that

we think like Jesus and change the way we live so that we're conforming and being obedient to what Jesus taught us concerning how we should live.

So, let me ask you a question. Do Christians get away with sin?

All Part Of God's Love

God's fundamental character is love and he would rather not judge, but he will judge us for our benefit so that we're not condemned with the world. He'll cut off things in our lives that are not profitable in order to keep the good pure. This is all part of God's love and it can be pretty daunting to find out that God loves us so much he's not prepared to leave us the way we are. You see he doesn't just put us in a bath of hot, soapy water to clean us up, like you'd expect him to do if we'd just been playing a game of rugby on a wet, muddy field. No! God goes much deeper than that. He performs surgery on us, because our problems don't stem from outside conditions and circumstances, our problems stem from the deepest recesses of our heart, which is the very root of us.

I've also noticed that God doesn't always administer anaesthetic. Indeed, I've very often been wide awake and fully aware when he's applied the knife. Not because he's cruel and sadistic, but because he wants **us** to know what's happening so we can remember our pain for future reference and

not have to undergo the same surgery twice. I've been absolutely amazed at how many people can go through a physical operation and yet continue doing the very things which caused their sickness in the first place – like carrying on smoking after an operation for cancer. If, like these people, we carry on in our old ways after God applied the knife and set us free, then God will deal more severely with us until, hopefully, we learn from our experiences. And boy, does God know how to operate!

Dealing With Our Secret Life

Paul said that whilst partaking of the bread and wine in our communion meal together we should examine ourselves so that we're not condemned with the world – in other words, God wants to deal with our secret ungodly lifestyle now, while we're still alive, whilst we still have a chance to mend our ways, rather than suffer the consequences when we face him at the judgement seat. This is God's goodness, he gives us space to repent. In the book of Revelation, it says that even Jezebel was given space to repent.

When Nathan the prophet confronted David about his adultery and murder, David had already had a few years to mull over what he'd done and put things right with God. Solomon was actually his fourth child to Bathsheba, but David had pushed his sin under the carpet for so long that he'd convinced

himself he was righteous.

I used to love listening to the sermons preached by Ravi Zacharias. I wasn't interested in his debate sessions, but I felt spiritually fed and uplifted hearing him preach. He came across as a sincere and humble man of God. When the rumours of his misconduct were first brought to my attention by friends I closed my ears tightly to all the slander, reminding myself of that verse of scripture which says that all who would live godly will suffer persecution. But when I read the report given by his own ministry organisation which confirmed all the allegations, plus many more, I wasn't only devastated, I was heartbroken.

No Chance For Repentance

He'd pushed his sin under the carpet, just like David had done, but the sad thing was that when he was confronted with legal action he'd paid off his victim and made her sign a non-disclosure agreement which enabled him to carry on with his sinful practices uncontested. Ravi was in the public eye, thousands followed his teaching and regarded him as the genuine article, a true Christian. To be exposed after his death when he had no opportunity to show what repentance looks like has caused much damage to the Kingdom of God. It's so sad that, to my knowledge, there was no Nathan the Prophet in his spiritual circle who could bring him the

correction and pruning of God.

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (*That word despite means 'to insult'. Ravi insulted the Spirit of grace*) For we know him that has said, Vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:28-31

Sadly, Ravi is now dead, and no longer has an opportunity to repent. As for me I'm really sad he was never publicly exposed during his lifetime. Yes, it would have been extremely painful for him because he could have ended up with no church, no ministry, and possibly no spiritual future, but it would have been during this period in the wilderness that he could have really found God. You never truly know God until all the trappings have been taken away. Job went through the same process. He was stripped of everything except his breath and his precious wife – that poor woman who couldn't comfort him because she was grieving herself. But it was then, in the worst trial of his life, that God spoke to Job

personally to give a true revelation of himself.

I was Different

When God turned the tables for me years ago and put me back in the ministry after three years of being a nomad, I knew I was different. I'd found **my** God. Not the God everyone preached about. I knew him for myself. Throughout my walk as a disciple of Jesus Christ my greatest trials, my times of being pruned, have turned out to be my greatest blessings for which I praise and thank the Lord. We must learn to put our limbs on the chopping block now because it's when God has cut off our ungodly, sinful cravings that we are changed into his likeness and this brings great pleasure and satisfaction not only to God but to us as well.

Scripture proclaims in so many places that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Soften your heart towards God now, and judge yourself whilst you have the chance. Don't take the risk of waiting until you have to face him on the day of judgement, because our God is a consuming fire.

Chapter 17

Stop, Look, and Listen

This chapter is about Naomi. What does a godly wife do if she's married to a backslidden husband?

In the book of Ruth, we read the story of a wealthy man, Elimelech, who owned a parcel of land in Bethlehem-Judah during the time when the judges ruled in Israel. Bethlehem means 'house of bread', and God had at last given the Israelites the promised land, a land which he said would be flowing with milk and honey. But in this very place where God's people should have been well fed, they faced an unexpected trial because there was a very severe famine. When the unexpected happens to God's people it's time to stop what we're doing, look, and listen. Just as Moses did when he saw a bush burning in the wilderness which wasn't being consumed. Scientists didn't control the weather thousands of years ago and one of the ways God judged his people when trying to get their attention was by sending famine.

It says several times in Judges: 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes'. Moses had received the law of God on Mt. Sinai and had faithfully delivered it to the Israelites, but because the Israelites in general didn't want to be ruled by God they rebelled against his statutes. One of God's laws was that they shouldn't join themselves in any way to the Moabites because they were cursed by God himself.

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless the LORD your God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing unto you, because the LORD your God loved you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days for ever.

Deuteronomy 23:3-6

Elimelech took no notice of this commandment of God. If he'd stopped and looked like Moses did, then he probably would have heard the voice of God telling him why the problem had occurred in the

first place. But he was so backslidden in heart that he instead forced his whole family, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, to leave their home and live in Moab. Elimelech means 'God is king', but he did what was right in his own eyes, and not long after his migration to Moab he died.

Both Son's Died

It seems that Elimelech's two sons were also backslidden, for instead of returning to Israel after their father's death they found themselves wives and integrated into the Moabite community. Mahlon, whose name means 'sickly', married Ruth, and Chilion, whose name means 'the pining one', married Orpah, but after only ten years of marriage both sons died.

You can't run from God's judgement, eventually, it will catch up with you.

Now Naomi had at last been freed as there were no backslidden men in her life to dictate what she should do. Good news had also come to her ears that the famine in Israel had ceased and God had blessed her homeland with food. She needed to hear this, she needed to feel hope in her heart again. It must have been really hard for her to live in Moab, this cursed country, and having Moabite daughters-in-law when she knew it contravened God's law. Thank God neither of her sons fathered children otherwise, she'd have continued to feel responsible

and the cycle would have gone on and on. But no, she was at liberty to return back home, and the girls could go back to their mothers. She could get right with God again.

And the women lifted up their voices, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And Naomi said, Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: you return after your sister-in-law.

Ruth 1:14-15

Orpah didn't object to the suggestion at all, and after kissing Naomi goodbye went back to her people and her gods. Ruth, however, was different and adamantly refused to leave. But it's what Ruth said that surprises me:

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you: for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge: your people shall be my people, and your God my God: where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death part you and me.

Verse 16-17

This was not a normal reaction from a young widow still in the prime of her life, as Naomi had no more sons for her to marry and considered herself too old to ever get married again.

Naomi, whose name means 'lovable', 'my delight', didn't put any pressure on Ruth to help her. Ruth, whose name meant 'female friend', said these words of her own free will. Why? Well, it was because Ruth had seen something special in Naomi and wanted to follow her God.

Thus says the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

Zechariah 8:20-23

What a testimony to Naomi and the way she had steadfastly served the Lord her God even though the males in her family had been backslidden. Ruth had found a true mother figure in Naomi whom she could sincerely love and had seen something in her lifestyle that she wanted, even more than having the fulfilment of a husband and children. She wanted to get to know Naomi's God for herself.

She Was Embarrassed

This may have been a great testimony to the light Naomi had been shining for her Lord God, but it was also a very embarrassing situation for her. How could she possibly bring home a daughter-in-law who was a Moabite? God himself had said:

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever.

Deuteronomy 23:3

Poor Naomi, what a situation to be placed in. She must have felt that God had dealt very bitterly with her. She'd been forced to leave the Holy Land to live in Moab, a cursed country, and shortly afterwards her husband died. Then her two sons found Moabite wives and 10 years later they also died. And now, to top it all, one of her Moabite daughters-in-law refused to leave her saying she wanted to go back to the Holy Land with her.

I suppose in meekness and utter brokenness Naomi resigned herself to this humiliating situation and accepted her lot. She went back to her home town but told everyone that from now on they were to call her Mara, meaning 'bitter', 'sad'. The whole community were shocked when they saw her

and must have grieved for how bitterly her life had turned out. She'd left them as a married woman with two children but was now returning bereaved, with a stranger. She'd tried her best to continue her godly lifestyle in a foreign, heathen land but had obviously failed as the Lord had dealt so harshly with her. What a tragic situation. From 'lovable' and 'my delight', she now wanted to be known as 'bitter' and 'sad' because that's just how she felt.

So Naomi and Ruth went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty: why then call you me Naomi, seeing the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?

Verse 19-20

The poor woman sounds just like Job, doesn't she? But remember what I said at the beginning of this chapter ... When the unexpected happens to God's people it's time to stop what we're doing, look, and listen. Just as Moses did when in the wilderness he saw a bush burning which wasn't being consumed. God was turning things around for Naomi. She may have lost a husband and two

sons, but what were they compared to this lovely, willing, and eager-to-please daughter-in-law who wanted to serve the Almighty God because of what she had witnessed in her own life alongside her? Ruth proved to be such an incredible blessing. God may have made a law saying that a Moabite would not be allowed to enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever; but the one who makes the laws can break the laws because he isn't bound by his laws. The laws are for us, not him!

What An Honour

Ruth became such a godly woman that she caught the eye of a rich relative of Naomi's husband who married her, and Naomi ended up being a great-great-grandmother of King David. What sort of an honour is that?

You know, we'll never have to give an account for the way members of our family feel about God. Our job is to live for our Lord the best we know how. Like Naomi, you too may be married to a spouse who has backslidden, or even be unsaved, but God is watching you.

Maurice and I often sing a song and some of the words say:

So many lives depend on what we do,
Give me the strength, oh Lord,

I'm going on with you.

If we come through our tests and trials God has a wonderful way of making all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

Don't lose heart. God has called us to live virtuous lives.

Fruit Of The Spirit

For those who don't really know what virtue is, well it's a good quality or way of behaving, like patience, humility, modesty, purity. We should all be pursuing the fruit of the spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

God's not interested in whether we profess to believe in him, go to church, say we're saved, or call ourselves Christians; it's the way we conduct ourselves, and our lifestyle that counts. And if we live to please him, and not ourselves, then he'll turn every one of our adverse circumstances around to work for our advantage, because this promise is for those who love God, the ones who are called to fulfil his purpose.

So, when you're in a dark place, stop, look, and listen, because God sees all and is trying to get your attention.

Chapter 18

Is There a Reason For Your Pain?

Have you ever wondered why you go through awful experiences, especially when you're trying your hardest to serve God and allow him to fulfil his will in your life? Can you imagine how difficult it was for Paul, when having such a burning passion to preach the gospel, his attempts to preach in certain places were thwarted by God himself? He and Silas had just visited Derbe and Lystra, and as they travelled through these cities, they delivered to the elders they were establishing there the decrees they should keep, and it seems their mission had been very successful.

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they, passing by Mysia, came down

to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and begged him, saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Acts 16:5-7

So Paul and Silas went to Macedonia, and on the sabbath went out of the city by a river side, where people went to pray; and when they'd sat down, they spoke to the women which gathered there. That's where they met Lydia, a seller of purple. She worshipped God so listened to them: and the Lord opened her heart to the things Paul and Silas were sharing. When she and her household were baptized she said to them, If you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and I'll host you. So that's where Paul and Silas stayed whilst in Macedonia.

Well, it so happened that as they went to prayer a young woman possessed with a spirit of divination met them. She'd earned a great deal of money for her masters by soothsaying (fortune telling). This young woman followed Paul and Silas yelling out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." And she did this for many days. But then Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the evil spirit in her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And the evil spirit came out.

When her masters saw they couldn't make money out of her anymore, they got hold of Paul

and Silas, dragged them into the marketplace where the rulers were, and brought them to the magistrates who were absolutely livid, and said, "These men, these Jews, are troubling our city and teaching customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to even observe, because we're Romans."

Beaten With Many Stripes

Well, hearing this, the multitude rose up together against Paul and Silas: and the magistrates tore off their clothes, commanding that they should be beaten. And when they'd beaten them with many stripes they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to make sure they didn't escape. The jailer, having received such a strong charge, thrust them into the inner prison fastening their feet with stocks.

What a predicament to be placed in! All because Paul had seen a vision and answered the call to help some man in Macedonia! And up to now all they'd done was baptise one woman and her household, and cast the devil out of one other woman.

But Paul wasn't a novice. He not only knew God had a plan, he also knew how to suffer for Christ. Their backs were bleeding, yes, but this was no new experience as altogether he'd suffered 39 stripes from the Roman whip five times, besides being beaten with rods, and stoned and left for dead! He'd been in many sticky situations and his almighty God had miraculously brought him

through to live and serve another day. Paul was learned in the scriptures so knew that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.

Deliverance At Midnight

I'm sure the heart of this man of faith was filled with anticipation as he waited to see what God would do this time. So, at midnight, at the very bleakest point, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises – yes, praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. Then, suddenly, there was a great earthquake, so that the very foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors of the prison were opened, and everyone's chains were loosed not only those of Paul and Silas! The prison jailer woke out of his sleep, saw the prison doors open, and drew out his sword intending to kill himself, supposing that all the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted out loudly, "Don't harm yourself: we're all here." The jailer called for a light, sprang in the cell trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. He brought them out, saying, "Sirs ... SIRS! ... What must I do to be saved?" Wow, what a different attitude now!

And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved, and your whole house." Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all that were in his house. And the jailer

took them that same hour of the night, washed their wounds; and was baptised, he and all his household, straight away. And when he'd brought them into his house, he set food before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

God Always Has A Plan

This is a fantastic story! **This** prison jailer was the man in Macedonia who'd needed Paul's help! **He** was imprisoned in that jail, just as much as the prisoners he was guarding. He couldn't leave his place of employment to go and hear Paul preach, so **Paul** had to be beaten, **Paul** had to be thrown in jail because **Paul** had to go to the Jailer. How else could he have heard the gospel? In Romans chapter 12 Paul writes that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God because it's our reasonable service. We owe God everything!

In 2016 I started having awful pains in my abdomen which kept me awake for at least four hours at night. I learned to control these pains by cutting out several foods from my diet. After about six or seven months I broke out in a full-body rash, and blistering sores, with the only place unaffected, thankfully, being my face. I'd no idea what had caused this and wondered if it had something to do with a new body cream or soap I was using. Anyway, I slipped up one evening and ate a packet of crisps so again woke with the pain, but on this occasion ,it

didn't go away after four hours, it was continuous, and it was crippling me.

I Trusted God

I hadn't consulted a doctor because since my teenage years, I'd trusted God after witnessing for myself so many healings and miracles in the church I attended. The only times I've felt the need for medical assistance for myself was during my pregnancies, and births of my children, and how I thanked and blessed God for the medical profession then.

I knew God could heal me if he wanted to, but didn't actually know what was causing my pain, which was now really intense, so I thought that maybe I should find out, then I'd know how to deal with it properly. By now it was 4pm on Friday so I thought I'd phone the doctor's surgery before they closed for the weekend. I rang and they said they could give me an appointment for a week on Thursday – that was in 14 days, but I was in agony **now!** Next, I tried a local walk-in-clinic and managed to get there just before they also closed for the weekend. After listening to what I related about my symptoms it was concluded I had an ulcer so was given a prescription saying the pain would go away in an hour if I took one of the pills. Actually, they were more concerned about the rash but they couldn't work out what it was. Well, I bought the

tablets, took one, and after some minutes ended up on my hands and knees vomiting like a dog on my kitchen floor.

I'd prayed throughout this episode for God's will in all of this pain and honestly felt ready for him to take me if he didn't heal me.

It's Time To Go

But it was at that very moment I heard God speak as though he was standing right next to me ...

"It's time to go to the hospital!"

It was as clear as crystal. I knew it was God's voice because that's not the way I think. Maurice took me to the A&E and, after vomiting five more times in the waiting room, was eventually seen.

It was the gall bladder. Apparently, I'd had gallstones for so long that they'd actually turned to mush so was admitted immediately. The surgeon who was going to perform the operation came to explain the procedure and brought along the doctor who'd be assisting him. Then about an hour later the doctor came back to ask me some further questions. When he asked me what I did for my living I told him I was retired, but then he asked what I did before retiring. I told him what my husband and I actually did whether retired or not and was astounded at his reaction. He blurted out, "I can't believe we're having this conversation! God's just told me to give up medicine and be a

shepherd of his sheep!"

Well, for the next one and a half hours we were locked in conversation, even though nurses with quizzical looks on their faces kept testing my blood pressure. And he was on duty, for goodness sake! My heart was burning, I was in heaven! When I was telling him all about the miracles I'd experienced in my own life and witnessed in the lives of others he asked, "Well, what are you doing here?" So I answered, "I've obviously been sent here to speak to you!"

Great Time In Hospital

When you're living for God, don't be surprised where you end up, or the methods God uses to get you there. Just like Paul, I had to go through pain and suffering to reach the people God wanted me to speak to. I had a fantastic few days in hospital. The nurses who tried to give me injections to stop my blood clotting during the operation explained that with being in bed all the time this was a real possibility as my body was inactive.

"No way! You don't have to give me those injections," I said, "I'll keep moving."

So off I went to the day room for a workout, with all the nurses peering through the windows and having a great old laugh as they watched me doing my exercises. Then I went on my rounds visiting the other patients – one old dear gave her heart to

Jesus and I showed her how to watch our YouTube videos on her tablet. And being in a ward with other patients was wonderful. I had a captive audience of women eager to listen to all my testimonies of God's amazing forgiveness and healing. I had such an exhilarating experience in that hospital. I knew I was in God's perfect will.

Feeling Like Paul

As I wrote and shared with my brethren my daily experiences of what God was doing in the ward during my incarceration, I felt just like Paul. And particularly when I actually went down for the operation I was filled with joy, for I knew it was possible that the next time I opened my eyes I could be looking into the eyes of Jesus as I might not come round from the anaesthetic. I was so ready! The young guy who was wheeling me in the hospital bed for the operation told me that patients were usually extremely nervous, and commented that he'd never known anyone 'so cool', as he put it. But God had **told** me to go to the hospital. I knew at that precise moment I was in his perfect will.

When relating my experiences to a medical friend of ours he said my rash was because the gallstones had turned to mush, and this mush was seeping through my whole body, poisoning me. His words were, "You went right to the wire!" Meaning I was very close to death! But hearing that thrilled me ... It's one thing to

say that you've put your life in God's hands, but it's quite another thing to actually do it. And it proved to me that I didn't just believe that I believed; I really did believe! And could truly trust God to speak personally and tell me what to do when he needed to.

Isn't it wonderful that we can put our whole trust, confidence, and lives in God's hands?

So stop complaining about the difficult situations you're in. We'll never have a testimony without a test. You might even be in your awful situation just so that you can reach someone God is trying to touch.

We've been given a life to live, but it's not all about us, it's about God! How can we please God? How can we, trapped in our humanity and sinful flesh, glorify God?

Well, we can present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, because it's our reasonable service. If you give yourself as a sacrifice you have no more say in what happens to you. It's our reasonable service because we've been bought with a price and are owned by God. If you've experienced the saving grace and love of God you should have learned by now that he loves you and can be trusted. Being in God's will has to be the most fulfilling place to be.

You know, I just love this life of faith ... It's so exciting!

Chapter 19

The Simplicity of Faith

Why is it that we think having faith is so difficult? For me, it's just the first step you make when you're convinced of something.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lies at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, **I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel ...** And Jesus said to the centurion, Go your way; and as you have believed, so be it done unto you. And his servant

was healed in the selfsame hour.

Matthew 8:5-13

So, what was the big deal about this conversation? This guy impressed Jesus greatly because he understood the principle of someone in authority being obeyed when they gave instructions. He recognised Jesus was a man with authority so took it for granted that if he said he'd heal his servant then his servant would be healed. And he was a Roman Centurion, he wasn't even Jewish!

Here's another encounter:

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, you Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she cries after us.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, **O woman,**

great is your faith: be it unto you even as you

want. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Matthew 15:22-28

In both of these scriptures people who were not the lost sheep of the house of Israel, the people whom Jesus had specifically come for, asked for help on behalf of others. The first was a Roman Centurion seeking help for his servant, and the second a Canaanite woman seeking help for her daughter. But they were both commended for their faith because they were prepared to just walk away after hearing Jesus speak without having seen any physical evidence. If Jesus said he'd do as they asked then as far as they were concerned it was done.

Getting your answer and hearing a word from the Lord is one thing, but holding on to it in faith is another, but that's what the Centurion and Canaanite woman had to do to get their miracles. They both held on to the promise Jesus gave them and when they returned to their homes found their prayers had been answered. It was done for them ... according to their faith! Paul writes:

Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

So many times circumstances play a huge part in determining whether we're going to hold on to a promise God has given us, but James, in his epistle, encourages us to count it

all joy when we fall into various temptations; knowing this, that the trying of our faith works patience. Circumstances is another word for 'temptations'.

Always Resistance To A Promise

Whenever God gives us a promise we're always going to encounter circumstances which contradict what we've been told. When God told 75 years old Abraham he'd be the father of many nations, he didn't heal his 65-year-old barren wife until she was 89, and the promised child was borne to him when he was 100. Abraham, who was a dead man so far as reproduction was concerned, held on to God's promise for 25 years even though all the odds were against him and God was well pleased with him, and the Bible says his faith was imputed to him for righteousness.

After sharing a parable saying men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Jesus finished off by saying:

Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:8

He is desperate to find faith amongst his people; men and women who will hold on to a word from God and not let go, no matter what the circumstances.

A Cloud Of Witnesses

The book of Hebrews gives some wonderful examples of people recommended for having this type of faith. God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, and because he'd heard the voice of God for himself he was filled with faith. Paul writes of him, saying:

... he believed, even God, who quickens the dead, and calls those things which be not, as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall your seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an 100 years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore, because he believed, it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Romans 4:17-22

You have to realise what a big deal this was for Abraham. Sarah, the wife of his youth, had been barren all their married life. After years of trying for a family with his wife, they both came to the

conclusion that if God's promise was going to be fulfilled it wouldn't be through Sarah, who was also desperate for a child. So out of love for her husband, and the desire to see God's plan brought about, she selflessly offered her handmaid to be a surrogate mother and Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 years old.

The Child Of Promise

But now, 13 years later, when both Abraham and Sarah had given up any notion of producing children together God steps in telling Abraham that Ishmael is not the promised child but that it would indeed come through Sarah. This news from God was like a bombshell to Abraham. By this time Sarah was 89 years old, and apart from being barren during her supposedly fruitful years, was now well past menopause! And by this time Abraham's reproductive organs were also defunct. They both felt well too old to even try! But in Hebrews, it says that even at 99 years of age: 'Abraham staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what God had promised, he was able also to perform.'

But don't think it was Abraham alone acting in faith, the scripture says a remarkable thing concerning Sarah:

And God said unto Abraham, Where is Sarah your wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And God said, I will certainly return unto you according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah your wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. **(She was well past menopause.)**

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? **(They probably hadn't had any physical intimacy since before Ishmael was born. She must have accepted that Ishmael would carry on Abraham's line.)**

And the LORD said unto Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. **(At this point Sarah must have popped her head round the tent door because it says...)**

Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And God said, No; but you did laugh.

Genesis 18:9

Sarah, this dear barren woman, who'd had to bear shame and feelings of inadequacy throughout her entire married life, had heard the voice of God for herself when she'd overheard a conversation between

God and her husband in their tent. What she heard made her chuckle inwardly in bemusement, but God had heard her challenged her, and spoken directly to her, telling her to her face that yes, she would have a child. After hearing the voice of God for herself faith rose up in her heart and she wanted Abraham, her 99-year-old husband, to make love to her feeble 89-year-old body. Scripture says her faith in what God had said gave her the physical strength to not only conceive but also to carry her husband's seed for nine months before giving birth for the very first time to their beautiful, bouncing, baby boy, Isaac.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Hebrews 11:11

You know, pregnancy can be really hard, even for a young woman, but God gave Sarah all the grace she needed to go through this ordeal to eventually hold her promised child in her arms. But, hey, this wasn't included in the scriptures just so we could learn how the Israelites came into existence. No, this was recorded for our benefit, so that we have an example, and role model to follow. We need this testimony because without faith it's impossible to please God. Without the faith to believe that he rewards those who diligently seek him it's impossible

to please God. And when we do have faith it's accounted to us for righteousness. We put our faith in God and what he's said to us, and in return we are made right with God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall your seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Hebrews 11:17-19

Abraham heard the voice of God telling him to take Isaac, this child of promise born to him when he was 100 years old, up a mountain and offer him up to God as a burnt sacrifice. This was a staggering request from God seeing that Isaac was a miracle baby in the first place. But because Abraham had faith that God knew what he was doing and there was a divine purpose, he believed that even if he killed Isaac God would raise him from the dead, so he obeyed the voice and did something about it. You can't have faith unless you follow it through with actions because faith without works is dead. It's never enough to just believe.

You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

James 2:19

Believing is not the same as having faith. Actions should always follow because that's the proof that we believed in the first place. Paul writes this in his book to the Hebrews:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

Hebrews 13:23

Verse 29 By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians tried to do but were drowned.

Verse 31 By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

James says this:

But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:20

You know, some of the instructions given by God were really simple to do, like the one given at that first Passover. All God told them to do was daub some of the blood from the slaughtered animal on the lintel and two doorposts to ensure that the whole household would be saved. That was so easy! If you

were the only household doing this you might have looked a bit odd, but it was a very simple instruction to follow.

On The Last Minute

Years ago I remember my daughter coming to me one Friday morning, just before school, informing me that she wouldn't be able to do her week of work experience unless she handed a form in the following Monday morning which had been signed by a willing employer. But there was a problem – she didn't even have a form! Aargh, kids! I told her to leave it with me, then racked my brains to see how I'd solve this situation.

This was impossible! But when I took it to God in prayer I immediately got a thought to get a form from her school and take it to the Midland Hotel, the hotel royalty and diplomats usually stay in when visiting Manchester. Well, I called at the school office only to be told they didn't have any forms left as they'd been handed out weeks ago, but after I suggested that perhaps one could be printed off from the computer, I came away with my form.

Now I had another problem. Parking in Manchester is a nightmare. I'd have to drive home, park my car, and then get a bus into town. So as I was driving home from school another thought popped into my head. Further on down the road past my house, there was a retail park

and the Blockbusters store there was always hiring part-time staff. It would be more convenient for me to call there and ask as I'd easily be able to park.

Two Voices

But just as this thought was formulating in my mind I could hear another voice. It was like I had two people sitting on my shoulders. One voice was telling me to go to Blockbusters, but the other one was telling me I'd jeopardise everything if I didn't follow through with what God had originally told me to do. So I drove home, parked my car, and got a bus into town.

Well, my first setback was when I was informed the person dealing with hiring staff wouldn't be available till the following Tuesday. But after I'd explained the predicament I was in, and that the form needed signing today otherwise my daughter would miss her chance, a young woman was called out to deal with me. After explaining the situation again the young woman very kindly signed my form giving Tamar a week's work the following June, but then told me that if I brought her to the hotel in January after she'd turned sixteen they'd give her a part-time job! I couldn't believe my ears. She'd not even set her eyes on Tamar!

No Problem At All

Well, sure enough, I rang the hotel in January and they asked me to bring her in for an interview. I was so surprised at the way this whole thing was conducted because they didn't even see Tamar on her own, I was present the whole time she was being interviewed. And when she was given an application form to fill out the manager smiled cheekily at Tamar saying, "Don't worry if you can't answer any of the questions, just ask your mum. You can do it between you!"

We had such fun! One of the questions was: Why do you want to work in a hotel? Tamar looked at me and asked, "What on earth do I say to that!"

"Erm, just write down, I've seen the 'Maid in Manhattan' movie." So she did, and we both had a giggle.

When the manager came back for the completed form, he went through it and laughingly said she'd passed with an unusually high score and had got the job. So Tamar had a job and was earning her own money before she'd even done her work experience week, or had even left high school!

What's that scripture in Ephesians ... God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

You know acting in faith is so simple. You just have to make that first step and God marvellously does all the rest.

Chapter 20

Is Believing in God Enough?

There's a vast difference between believing in God and having faith in God. The Bible says that the devils believe in God and even tremble because they don't only know he exists, they fear him knowing he's the almighty powerful one ultimately in charge. But they don't have faith in him, they don't put their complete trust and confidence in him, and the majority of so-called 'Believers' I've come across have a similar approach towards God. There are those who believe ... and there are others who just believe that they believe. They go to church, they read their Bibles and say their prayers, but they don't actually believe or have complete trust and faith in God.

When trying to have fellowship with some long-standing members of the church I've been astounded to find out that they actually take with a pinch of salt many things recorded in the Bible. I was having a conversation with

a Christian sister one day when the subject of creation cropped up.

Unbelieving Believers

"Nah", she said, "I don't believe God created the whole world in six days. How could he possibly do that? I think that's just symbolic!"

So I asked her what she thought about Noah and the flood.

"Nah, I don't think that happened either. A loving God wouldn't flood the whole world and destroy everyone and everything."

The same went for Joshua and the battle of Jericho where the walls fell down after the Israelites had shouted, and Daniel was kept safe when thrown into a den of lions.

She believed in God – meaning she knew he existed, but had no faith that the Bible was God's word. She made her own decisions about what she could accept as literal, and what was just allegory.

This was the gripe God had with Israel in the wilderness. He gave them some very simple instructions. For instance, as the Sabbath was given as a gift to them, a complete day of rest so they could spend quality time with their families, he told them not to do any work on that particular day. How grieved God must have been when somebody got caught going out to collect firewood.

God told them to collect a double quantity

of Manna on the sixth day so they wouldn't need to collect any on the Sabbath, but people went out looking for it on the Sabbath day.

He told them to get fresh Manna every day and not store any up for the following day as if they did it would breed worms and stink; and lo and behold that's exactly what they did, so they got the results God had predicted.

Simple Obedience Is Required

This is the gripe God has with his people today. God never tells us to do anything we can't do. If we obey by doing the simple things he requires of us, the results of our actions can sometimes be miraculously staggering, but that's God's part, not ours. Ours is always a simple act of obedience done because we've put our complete trust in God, and this gives God the right to do the big things which are impossible for men.

Have you ever read the story of Naaman? He was a mighty man of valour, captain of the king of Syria's host, a great man with his master, and highly honoured because by him the LORD had given deliverance to Syria. But he had a huge problem – he was a leper.

The Syrians had gone out to war and had brought away a captive out of the land of Israel a little maid who waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress one day, "If only my lord Naaman

were with the prophet that is in Samaria! He'd heal him of his leprosy."

As it happened, somebody heard what the maid had said and reported it to the king, so the king sent 10 talents of silver, 6,000 pieces of gold, and 10 changes of clothing, together with a letter to the King of Israel saying, "Behold, I have herewith sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may recover him of his leprosy."

I'm Not God

Can you imagine how the King of Israel felt when he read the letter? He tore his clothes, and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends a letter asking me to heal a man of his leprosy? He's seeking a quarrel against me."

And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand,

and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

2 Kings 5:8-12

Naaman was livid! This mighty, respected, honourable man was being treated as though he were a nobody! He'd expected Elisha, the mighty prophet of God, to do some great sacrifice and say a grand prayer calling on the name of the Lord God Jehovah to bring about a mighty miracle ... but he'd shown him absolutely no respect at all. He hadn't even come to the door but had sent his servant to instruct him as to what he should do. Naaman wasn't going to put up with this type of treatment. He'd never been so insulted in all his life. So he turned and went away in a rage.

And his servants came near, and spoke unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather then, when he said to you, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

2 Kings 5:13-14

His servants were right. Naaman was used to doing mighty acts of valour. It sat right with him

to do things others couldn't do and it brought him great glory and honour. To be instructed to dip seven times in a filthy river was beneath his dignity. It was only his desperation and the realisation that he couldn't solve the problem himself which made him give it a go. If he dipped seven times and nothing happened, well he'd been a silly fool and embarrassed himself, but he could easily get rid of those who'd witnessed the spectacle to ensure he kept his reputation. But his obedience was rewarded and his flesh was cleansed and became like a child's.

Simple Obedience

God asks us to do what we can do, simple things, and the results and sometimes miracles which follow no one can take credit for because they're all his doing.

I once heard an incredible testimony of a man who thought he'd heard God telling him to go into the local launderette, do a headstand, and then come out. I say he thought he heard God because even though it was clear to him he couldn't possibly imagine that God would ever ask him to do such a stupid thing as that, so he tried to dismiss it. But no matter how hard he tried the thought wouldn't go away and he had no peace. Eventually, he reasoned with himself that if he dashed in five minutes before closing time on a Saturday night there probably wouldn't be anybody in the shop and he could do it

without looking like a complete idiot. So that's what he did, he waited until five minutes before closing time, walked into the shop to do his handstand in a place where he felt least exposed, and then dashed out again.

A Strange Request!

As it happened there was a man still in the shop who'd been having a real battle struggling to believe that God was real, or even listened to his prayers. He wanted proof. So he'd put out a challenge to God saying, "If you really do exist and can hear me, then send somebody into this laundrette right now to do a handstand and I'll believe in you!"

Isn't that what Thomas implied when he said, "Unless I put my fingers into the holes in his hands and in his side for myself I won't believe he's risen from the dead"?

Paul writes in Hebrews:

Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

If we're genuinely wanting to know the truth I believe God will reward us by answering our questions. But we must take note of what Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have

believed: but blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Faith Is The Answer

We have to exercise faith concerning so many things when we come into a relationship with God and Jesus, for without faith there's absolutely no way we can please God. That's all Jesus will be looking for when he returns to this earth for his millennial reign.

...Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:8

Let's deal with our doubts and unbelief to ensure Jesus finds what he's looking for.

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