

A young woman with blonde hair styled in a bun, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a green sweater. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. She is holding a white sign with an orange border that contains the text 'Easier SAID Than DONE!' in purple. The background is a solid light green color.

Easier
SAID
Than
DONE!

Living life on the narrow way

Joanna Barratt

Easier
SAID
than
DONE

Easier Said Than Done

by Joanna Barratt

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-7392723-3-3

First Published & Printed December 2023

by Barratt Ministries Publications

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Introduction

I've entitled this book 'Easier Said Than Done' because it shocks me to see how quickly people fall to pieces when disaster strikes. By people, I mean those who profess to be Believers, those who profess to have a deep faith in God, those who believe they 'can do all things through Christ who strengthens them'! It has been quite a painful experience to hear the confusion, fear, and defeatist talk from those going through their trials, and I can now understand fully why God permits them ... He needs to know if we can live up to what we profess. Without the test, there can never be a test-imony. God wants truth in the inward parts. David, the Psalmist, came to the conclusion, after he'd asked the question of who shall abide in God's tabernacle, that it would be those who walk uprightly, work righteousness ... and speak the truth in their own hearts. In other words, they don't kid themselves.

I hope this book challenges you to seriously

look at your own life to see whether your lifestyle matches your profession, and if it doesn't may God help you to change so that you're ready to meet Jesus when he returns.

Chapter 1

Baptised in the Name of the Father

I don't know whether you've noted this but in Matthew 28, after Jesus had risen from the dead and just before his ascension into Heaven, he gave his eleven specially selected disciples a different commission to the one he'd given them at first in Matthew 10. He initially told them to preach the gospel of the Kingdom and heal the sick, but now he specified that they were to baptise and teach.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto

me in heaven and in earth. Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:16-20

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you", Jesus meant that he was now taking over from Moses.

I read from the King James Version which William Tyndale, the translator, was actually martyred for giving us in 1536. In fact, this was the only Bible we had until 1952 when the market began to get flooded with modern versions. These versions can often shed a different light on particular passages of scripture, but I always use my KJV as my reference point. So, from that passage I've just read, I don't know whether you noticed this, but certain groups of words have been separated by commas. Jesus told his disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, comma, and of the Son, comma, and of the Holy Ghost. This denotes that there are three separate baptisms. You'll be familiar, I'm sure, with water baptism which is being baptised into the Son, and the baptism in the Holy Ghost, but I've entitled this chapter, 'Baptised in the Name of the Father' because you might never have heard this expression

before.

I wonder if you've ever come across this scripture:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

1 Corinthians 10:1-2

They were all baptised unto Moses 'in the cloud' and 'in the sea', what does that mean? Well, if we read the account in Exodus 14 we'll see clearly that the Israelites were certainly not baptised in the cloud the way we understand baptism, which is by full immersion in water, as this particular cloud went before or behind them without ever touching them, and there's no intimation it was a rain cloud. If it was they perhaps could have been sprinkled, but in no way would this have been considered a baptism. Neither were they baptised when they went through the Red Sea because again the Bible clearly states that the Lord caused a strong east wind to blow all night making the sea-bed dry land, and the waters were divided forming a wall to them on the right hand and on the left. From this whole narrative it's evident that they passed through the sea without

being 'immersed' in it. So, when Jesus told his disciples to 'baptise in the name of the Father', what did he mean?

First of all we have to realise who God is. His name is Jehovah, he's the creator of the heavens and the earth. When he appeared to the children of Israel in the wilderness, after showing them his tremendous power which enabled them to be set free from Egypt, he introduced himself with these words:

I am the LORD your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Exodus 20:2

He was actually saying, "I'm the one who did all those mighty signs and wonders in Egypt which caused Pharaoh to let you go, and I did it because I promised Abraham I would bless his seed. I love you and I want you to only love me." Then he proceeded to show them his character.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of

them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:3

Then follow all the commandment. But verse 18 says this:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, You speak with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that you sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

Exodus 20:18

Moses was 'baptised in the name of the Father' because he literally went up into the cloud, and was immersed in the thick darkness where God was. He had a personal relationship with God. But the Israelites didn't want a personal relationship with God, nor did they want to come under God's authority. So, when Moses went up the mountain

to get the commandments from Jehovah they made their own god, the golden calf, because they couldn't cope with the real God. They hadn't liked what they'd seen. And throughout their 40 years in the wilderness they kept saying that they wanted to go back to Egypt, the very place they'd been begging God for 400 years to free them from.

God Wants us to Fear Him

Moses had told the people God was come to prove them, that his fear might be before their faces so they wouldn't sin. There's a reason God wants us to fear, and that's because one day we're all going to have to give an account for what we've done with this gift of life we've all been given, the way we've lived on this earth. Make no mistake, there are two extremes to God's character. On one hand he's full of love, tenderness, and compassion; but on the other hand he's a fearful judge. Enoch, who was taken to Heaven without ever tasting death, prophesied that the Lord was coming with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly, of all their ungodly deeds which they've committed, and of all their wicked speeches spoken against God.

God is at war with anyone who lives an ungodly

life preferring the god of this world rather than him.

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

Isaiah 13:9-13

Thankfully, God also knows human nature. He remembers we're only dust and that after 6000 years of sin in our DNA there's not a chance that we can live a righteous life. Under the Old Covenant God made with Moses the children of Israel could bring sacrifices to atone for their sins making them right with God, but we gentiles had no such provision,

so no access to God. In fact, we were classed as dogs and had no hope of salvation. We were born sinners and, as we've just read and been warned, one day God will judge everyone on this earth for the deeds done in their bodies. The Bible tells us clearly that the wages we'll receive for our sins and iniquities is death, not only physical death, but spiritual death too, the lake of fire for eternity. We had no hope of ever making peace with God Almighty because our sins had made us his enemy.

God's Free Gift

But the good news of the gospel is that this fearful judge, whom we should fear, has bent over backwards for all mankind, not only for the Jews, but for us gentiles too, and has provided a way for us to be saved from ever having to experience his wrath. The wages of sin is death, the Bible says, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We can have peace, not war, with God.

If we want to sum up God's character we can say it in one word - LOVE. God is love. Name denotes character, so when we talk about being 'baptised in the name of the Father', we are being baptised into the very character of God himself.

All things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:18

This scripture is saying that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself (God), not imputing their trespasses unto them; so we need to be reconciled to God. In his mercy for mankind he made his sinless son, Jesus Christ, to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (Jesus).

My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:1-2

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:10

That word propitiation means to calm, or to appease. The wages of sin is death, but because Jesus gave his life for us on the cross it appeased God's

anger towards us which was caused by our sin.

John then goes on to tell us what happens when God comes into our life:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us (*that we've been baptised in the name of the Father*), because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.

Verse 11-16

This passage of scripture is saying that Jesus appeased God's anger for the 'whosoever', but there are conditions to receiving any promise from God.

Firstly, we have to have the revelation, and believe it, that the Lord Jesus Christ was the sinless son of God, and that he died on a cross 2000 years ago so that we could be forgiven and freed from the awful penalty of our sins to have peace with God.

Living According to God's Rules

Secondly, we must prove our belief by making a commitment to change our lifestyle and come under God's authority. We now have to live according to God's rules, and John states that the character of God is love. This was what was meant when we read in the Bible that the children of Israel were baptised unto Moses 'in the cloud' and 'in the sea'. They acknowledged Moses as their leader, and did what Moses told them to do. It must have been a terrifying experience for the Israelites to walk on the sea-bed right in the middle of two walls of water. There were millions of people all crowded together with no chance of survival if the waters fell on top of them. They had to put their trust in Moses, and this is what is expected of us when we're baptised into God. God wants us to accept the free gift of forgiveness of sins through his son Jesus Christ, and put our complete trust in him, to believe with all our hearts that he loves us and knows what's best for us.

If we can commit to these conditions God comes into our hearts and we are born of God. We now have the DNA of our Heavenly Father giving us the capacity to love instead of hate, forgive instead of bearing grudges, because, just like that scripture

said: God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.

Now then, once you've been 'baptised in the name of the Father' you'll need to be 'baptised in the name of the Son' as soon as possible because we can't develop this new characteristic of God's love without help. Just read this scripture:

God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Jesus. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son Jesus, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by Jesus's life.

Romans 5:8-10

Being 'baptised in the name of the Father' means we have been reconciled to God, we've been brought into a relationship with God and can now call him our Father because the sin problem has been dealt with. We no longer have to fear his wrath which will fall on the unbelievers. But we also need to be 'baptised in the name of the Son', into the character of God's Son, Jesus, who was absolutely pure and obedient to his Heavenly Father.

Dying to the Old Life

It's impossible for us to live a life pleasing to God without Jesus living his life through us. With this baptism we have to do something practical to symbolise a spiritual reality. We have to be fully immersed into water, signifying the fact that we've been thoroughly cleansed from sin and all that's of the world, but also that we've voluntarily died to our old way of life, and when coming up out of the water have accepted the reality that we are risen with Christ to live a new spiritual life. This is a new life where we're coming under the authority of Jesus and observing all things whatsoever he commanded us to do.

If we're going to live for God in this present evil world, then we're going to need all the help we can get.

Chapter 2

Baptised in the Name of the Son

I've been thinking how grateful I am that Jesus said we had to die to self. At one time this phrase sounded so negative, as though I had to give up everything that was valuable to me – my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions, my whole life. But I've come to realise over the years that my hopes, dreams, ambitions, and desires, were the very things that got me into trouble, causing me such grief, and put up a barrier between me and God. I'm not expected to **give up** anything. No, not at all! Jesus has given me the opportunity to exchange a wasteful and pointless life for one that is meaningful and of value, not only to God, but to me as well.

Something Special to Look Forward To

We all know we were born paupers. We came into this world with nothing and when we die whatever we've accumulated will remain behind to be inherited by others, which means we leave this world as we came into it – paupers. But because I made a commitment to die to myself here in this life for Jesus's sake when I was baptised in water, baptised into Christ, I've got something very precious to look forward to when I leave this world. Jesus has promised that whoever gives up **their** life for him now, in this present evil world, will live in bliss with him and our precious Heavenly Father the Almighty God for eternity. Paul wrote these amazing words:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Did you notice the wording here? It says we live by of the faith **of** the Son of God, not by faith **in** the son of God. You might think I'm being pedantic, but believe me, there's a world of difference between **of** and **in**, because it's Christ's faith not our faith.

Dead Men Don't Have Faith

First of all, if as Paul says in that scripture that he's been crucified with Christ, that means Paul considers himself to be dead. He no longer has a choice about anything he does because he's died to all his hopes, dreams, ambitions, and even his life whether he lives or dies. So if Paul's dead, how can he have faith? A dead man can't have faith!

This is what being baptised into Christ symbolises.

And you are complete in him (*Jesus*), which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:10-12

When we're baptised into Christ (this is the circumcision made without hands), the fact that we've gone completely under the water symbolises that we've been drowned, judged already like those ungodly sinners who died in the great flood. We've

died to our old lives, it's now dead and buried in the water. But as we rise up out of the water this symbolises that we've risen from the dead, just like Christ did when the very fact he had faith in his father, literally, raised him from the dead on the third day after he'd been crucified.

Preparing to Die

Never think that the cross, or death, were easy for Jesus. He had the fullness of God in his physical body, yes, but he was a man, flesh and blood, in every sense of the word. When he prayed to his Heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane he knew he was about to pass through the most excruciatingly painful ordeal of his life, and believe me, he was scared. Talking of Jesus, Paul tells us what went on in his mind as he prepared himself for this event.

He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; and though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.

Hebrews 5:7-8

'By the things which he suffered' means he learned obedience by the things he didn't resist but allowed to happen in his life. He even allowed himself

to be murdered, because there was a prophecy given by David in the Psalms that Jesus clung to, even as he hung on the cross.

For you will not leave my soul in hell; neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption.

Psalms 16:10

This is why Jesus said just before he gave up the ghost: "Into your hands I commend my spirit". He was saying, "Father I'm trusting you with my spirit, even as I pass through the death of my body, because you've promised you will not leave my soul in hell (that's Hades, the place of the dead), but you'll raise me to life so I won't experience the corruption of my body." Jesus allowed himself to be crucified because he knew this prophecy was about him and he, personally, had faith in what his Father had promised him. And his faith pleased God so much that on the third day God fulfilled his promise by raising Jesus from the dead. Mary Magdalene, that godly, thankful woman who represents the Bride of Christ, had the privilege of seeing him just after he'd come out of the tomb before he'd presented himself to his Father in Heaven. She met him before he went up from the earth, and the Bride of Christ will meet him in the air before he comes back down to the earth.

You know we put too much trust in our faith. Unless we've been severely tested we'll never know how much faith we truly have. Approximately 2.5 million people were delivered out of Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, then watched all their enemies drowned in the same waters they'd just walked through. It's no wonder they danced and celebrated on the other side – who wouldn't? That generation of Israelites saw stupendous miracles. In that moment they could believe and have faith in God to do absolutely anything!

Only a Remnant Came Through the Test

But what were they like when they faced hunger, thirst, and the boredom of the same old menu day after day for months on end in the wilderness? Or when God told them it was time to go into Canaan and fight for what he'd promised them? Only two of that older generation who'd left Egypt were considered worthy to receive the promise – that was Joshua, the faithful servant of Moses who kept going up the mount with him when he met with God, and Caleb, who's name means 'dog', who couldn't let go of the miracles he'd seen in Egypt and believed God would do it again and fight for them.

We're No Different

The scary thing about this is that human nature doesn't change. What makes us think we're any better than those Israelites who have gone before us? God was faithful to his promise, yes, but this is what he said concerning those Israelites:

In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up my hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up my hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; in the day that I lifted up my hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: then said I unto them, Cast you away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought (*that means I worked*) for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted

before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them.

But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for my name's sake (*I did this in a way that wouldn't ruin my reputation*), so that my name should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out.

Ezekiel 20:5-14

For 40 years God provided nourishment for the children of Israel in the wilderness because they were his responsibility, they were his children. They were living because of the faithfulness of God, because God was faithful to the promise he'd made

to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I have children, and they didn't exist or live because they had faith in me. Faith never came into it. Not once did they have to concern themselves with such things as rent, electricity or gas bills. They had food on the table, clothes on their backs, phones, and the internet not because they had faith in me or their Dad, but because Maurice and I as parents had the faith that we'd be able to support and sustain them even though we had no regular income due to the fact God had called us to full time ministry. As they began to grow up they learned through experience that they could trust us to take care of them, but whether they trusted us or not we were looking after them anyway. Whether the children of Israel had faith in God or not was of no consequence. God took responsibility and cared for them physically anyway.

Circumcising the Heart

So, when Paul said he lived by the faith **of** the son of God, he was talking about his spiritual life. As soon as Saul of Tarsus (that's who Paul was at first) had met and been called by the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road, he completely gave up running and controlling his own life. He was baptised in water and took seriously his commitment by circumcising

his heart and cutting off, or putting to death, his old, carnal self. Then, after being given a new identity, he became Paul the Apostle because he'd been enlightened, and his spirit that had once been dead to God in trespasses and sins had been quickened, raised to spiritual life, even whilst he was still living in his physical body on earth. While ever he was attached to Jesus (who's the vine), and was being spiritually nourished by him (allowing the sap of that vine to flow through his spiritual veins) then he was living that spiritual life which was pleasing to God by the faith **of** Jesus Christ, because it was Jesus's life that was keeping him alive spiritually and causing him to bear fruit for God. Jesus had taken responsibility for him. This is what can happen for us if we'll take our commitment at water baptism seriously, and allow God to take hold of the reins of our lives.

Being Different

The Israelites circumcised their baby boys when they were just only eight days old. The babies didn't understand anything about what was happening to them, neither was it their own voluntary decision. But as they grew up their parents educated them and explained why they were different to those of other cultures. They'd tell them, "We're Israelites, and this is what we do, this is how we live." That's

exactly what should happen with Believers. In the Bible we read that immediately after conversion the Believers were baptised into Christ. They hardly knew anything! They just heard about Jesus, were convicted, and believed! But then the teaching started. Experience first, teaching second. It's so sad that churches today do things the other way round from what the Bible teaches as too much head knowledge can cause real barriers to ever entering into a genuine experience. Jesus did what no man before him had ever done. He lived a sinless, spotless life, and was totally obedient to God in a human body. He actually undid what Adam did.

...For if through the offence of one (*Adam*) many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded unto many. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners (*the 'one man being Adam*), so by the obedience of one (Jesus Christ) shall many be made righteous.

Romans 5:15

Before Jesus died on the cross, whilst in the upper room with his disciples, he shared some very personal and intimate secrets which you can read for yourself in John chapters 13-17, and this was the prayer to his Heavenly Father he spoke out loud for

them all to hear.

Father, I have manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world: yours they were, and you gave them me; and they have kept your word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever you have given me are of you. For I have given unto them the words which you gave me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from you, and they have believed that you did send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which you have given me; for they are yours. And all mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you.

Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name: those that you gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost, except the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

John 17:6

Jesus loved those whom his father had given him and gave his life for them so that they could be together with him in eternity. He told them

that in his father's house there are many mansions and that he was going away to prepare a place for them. Of course Paul learned to trust Jesus, that's why he said he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him, but he knew his spiritual life, both during his time in the flesh as well as in the future, came from Christ alone. And we need to learn this too.

Abiding in the Vine

We can quote the scripture, saying the words with our lips: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me", but unless we're continually getting our spiritual nourishment from Christ by being attached to the vine, and actually allowing God to have full and complete control of our lives meaning our hopes, our dreams, our ambitions, whether we live or die then they're just empty, valueless words, making us hypocrites.

But hey, if we can say those words and really mean them, wow, what a glorious future we have to look forward to, because Jesus, especially if he's praying for us, can ensure that we'll be with him one day, in the very near future, in his father's house.

Baptised in the Name of the Son

Chapter 3

Baptised in the Name of the Holy Ghost

Part 1

Years ago when my husband Maurice and I only had one child, Nathan, we went on a family holiday together and I can remember so vividly Nathan's little voice squealing, "Wendy, Wendy, I can swim! I can swim!"

Someone had given Nathan the 'Peter Pan' video for his birthday and he'd watched it rather a lot, so consequently he'd started calling himself Peter and me Wendy. That was okay at home, but the problem was that he called me Wendy everywhere we were, and in some circumstances, like on this particular

occasion, it was quite embarrassing as I was eight months pregnant with Izaak my second child and he was innocently making me out to be just the woman who lived with his Dad.

Learning from Watching my Children

Because I was heavily pregnant, Maurice took Nathan to the complex swimming pool each day and I'd go along about twenty minutes later to see how they were doing. The last time Nathan had been swimming was when he was ten months old so this was quite a novel experience for him, and he was always thrilled to bits to see me come to the pool side. We couldn't convince him that he wasn't really swimming because there he was, with his little rubber ring on, floating and splashing about in the water without his feet touching the ground with nobody holding him. I've learned a great deal watching my children grow up, and it's caused me to look back and remember quite a few things that happened in my own life.

I'd been the church organist from the age of fifteen. My Pastor was full of encouragement and before each service he'd take those participating in the service into the vestry to pray together for the meeting. He'd give us a pep talk so that we all understood what he would be preaching about and

the message he was aiming to get across so we would all have this vision in view. Nearly every time as we walked onto the platform he'd nudge me with his elbow and whisper softly under his breath, "Okay, Joanna, play and sing in the Spirit this morning," and I'd always respond with a knowing look as if to say, "Of course, that's what I always do!" I knew what we were after, and every week I'd put my heart and soul into what I was doing, until one day something took hold of me and I actually did sing and play in the Spirit! It took me completely by surprise, but suddenly the Spirit of God came upon me during a song and something happened which I'd never experienced before. It was as though I'd suddenly become possessed. It took over my mind so that I was no longer aware of what I was doing or where I was, it was just me and God.

Experience is Vital to Growth

You know, becoming a Christian is just like being born. Every child, if fed properly, will physically grow daily until it becomes an adult. But unless that child has first hand experience of life it will grow up to be very stunted mentally, ending up with just head knowledge. I'd been introduced to this lively Pentecostal church at the age of nine and by the time I was twelve had been baptised in both water

and the Holy Spirit. Now what? It wasn't until I was about twenty-five years old that my Pastor started preaching the Sermon on the Mount at Sharon Church, it was then I realised I needed to do something practical to grow.

Holy Ghost Retreats

I had a very good friendship and relationship with the Pastor's two daughters, and because we were all desiring to be more godly we decided to take a holiday together but make it like a retreat where we'd spend time during our days praying and seeking God together for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. Lis, who was the same age as myself, was the only one of us who'd ever seen a vision, so we made her lead the meetings, and during the course of that week I tried my best to leave myself open to God.

By the end of our week together both myself and Chris, who was the pastor's youngest daughter, were seeing visions, albeit very small pictures. That didn't matter though because we were learning somewhat to open ourselves up to God's Spirit, and because we found so much benefit in taking holidays in this way together we decided to repeat it for a few years afterwards and slowly we got to know God in a better, deeper way, and at the same time realised that we'd always only had our toes in the water. We'd

never really learned how to swim.

Being born again, is being born of the spirit, not the flesh. It's a totally new environment which is alien to us. When the disciples were physically with Jesus they did all kinds of supernatural things like healing the sick and casting out devils because the Holy Spirit was working **with** them. But just before Jesus died on the cross he comforted his disciples by saying it was necessary for him to go away because then God would send the Holy Spirit to actually dwell **inside** them. These are some of the things he told them whilst in the upper room just before he was killed:

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

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me.

John 15:26

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient (*it's necessary*) for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you;

but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

John 16:7

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.

John 16:13

The disciples already had a relationship with God, they were of the house of Israel (God's special people) and Jesus even told them how to speak and pray to God. They certainly had a relationship with Jesus because they were living with him and he was sharing his heart with them on a daily basis. But they couldn't have a relationship with the Holy Spirit as he hadn't yet been sent.

When Jesus had risen from the dead and revealed himself to his disciples, just before returning to his Heavenly Father, he instructed them to, "Go, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost": and if you look at this scripture carefully you'll see that there's a comma after each baptism mentioned here, meaning there are three baptisms, not one.

Paul talked about water baptism in his epistles saying it was equivalent to circumcision. This is what he wrote in Colossians:

And you are complete in him (Jesus), which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:10-12

Being baptised in the name of the Father means we need to cut off our relationships with anything worldly. We have a new father now and belong to a new family, we're citizens of a new country, the kingdom of God, and are now alienated from this world.

Being baptised in the name of the Son means we need to cut ourselves off from living lives just to please ourselves. The children of Israel were God's people even whilst they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and because of this he looked after them by providing food and water, even their clothes and shoes didn't wear out; but they were not circumcised in their hearts. They had not cut off from the world they'd been delivered from and still hankered after the 'fleshpots' of Egypt. We have been forgiven by the sacrifice Jesus made when he died on the cross

and brought us into the family of God, but we need to be circumcised in our hearts – we need to cut off our old sinful habits. By being baptised in water we make a public declaration that we have died to our old selfish lifestyles, and as Christ was raised from the dead we also are rising to a different way of life whereby we allow Jesus to live his life of obedience to God through us.

Serving the Law of God

Being baptised in the Holy Ghost means that now all worldly thinking needs to be cut off from our minds. The body has been dealt with by being buried with Jesus when we were baptised in water. Sadly we'll still do the things we don't want to do because we're shackled with a sinful body and that's why Paul said that with his flesh he serves the law of sin, but with his mind he serves the law of God. This is why we now need to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, we need to be fully immersed in the Holy Spirit, so that our minds are renewed. We need to think with the mind of Christ and be in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit in us. Before Jesus rose from the dead the Holy Spirit used to come upon people, they did miraculous things because they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But Jesus promised his disciples that one day that Holy Spirit would

actually live in them and they would act under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 7:37-39

So, how do you get filled with the Spirit? Well, I'm going to look back at my three year old Nathan. He splashed about and felt secure in the water while ever he had that rubber ring around him. The disciples felt the same. While ever Jesus was with them they had the authority to do miracles because the Holy Spirit was working **with** them. But once he'd been taken away, once the rubber ring goes, it's a different story altogether. Everything concerning our life with God and Jesus is to do with faith, and so it is with the Holy Spirit. Pray for God to baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

The Spiritual Realm

The spiritual realm is a vast realm and totally

outside our human understanding. God wants us to have faith and get our feet wet in this living water, splash around and experience the excitement of this new element. To plunge into it and allow ourselves to float as the water carries us, then plunge into its depths and see the vast world beneath these waters that cannot be seen from the surface – the fish, the coral, the life below. Deep sea divers exercise tremendous faith because they render themselves completely vulnerable to aqualungs so they can explore things we humans cannot see physically.

I'm convinced that even during a whole lifetime we could never experience God in the way He intends us to; that will only happen when we meet Him face to face in eternity. But we, as spiritual beings, miss so much when we are afraid to explore spiritual things.

Chapter 4

Baptised in the Name of the Holy Ghost

Part 2

In the last chapter I wrote about my son who had been convinced he was swimming because his feet weren't touching the bottom of the swimming pool, but he could only do this because he had his rubber ring on. That's the way many people feel about their spiritual walk. They're convinced they've been filled with the Holy Spirit because he's revealed things to them, even shown them visions, and guided them to the truth, but all these things were experienced before Jesus sent the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit has always been with us. They read scriptures like:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess;
but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves
in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing
and making melody in your heart to the Lord;
giving thanks always for all things unto God and
the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;
Ephesians 5:18-20

...But it's impossible to do this if you've not been baptised in the Holy Spirit. The early disciples did some spectacular things whilst Jesus was walking with them, they had that rubber ring on. But Jesus made it very clear that things would be different when he left them.

If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, **and shall be** in you.

John 14:15-17

The Holy Spirit wasn't in them, but then we read in Acts 2, after Jesus has died and been raised from the dead, that when the disciples were gathered

together in the upper room they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues which they'd never learned.

Although tremendous miracles happened in the Old Testament like: people being healed or raised from the dead, Moses holding up his rod and opening the Red Sea, and Joshua actually stopping the sun from going down, there's no record of anyone speaking in tongues. This was brand new. This was the physical evidence of what Jesus was talking about in John 7:

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spoke he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 7:37-39

Baptisms are no ordinary things with God, there has to be significant change otherwise they're just a religious ritual. Jesus said, "You'll know them by their fruit". The truth of what people say comes out sooner or later.

When we're baptised into the Father, that's

when we get what people term 'saved' – we become children of God and have a relationship with our Heavenly Father. If we carry on living our life in the same way as we did before we 'got saved' then it's all talk, and just something in our imagination, because there's no evidence to back up our profession.

Not a Ritual

When we're baptised into Jesus we're fully immersed into the water declaring the fact that we've made a commitment to die to what we want and have determined to follow the lifestyle of Jesus, who only did the things that pleased his Father, never himself. Obviously, there should be a change in our lifestyle otherwise this too is just religious ritual.

It's the same when being baptised in the Holy Spirit. There has to be evidence in our lives that we've been baptised otherwise we have no proof. The early disciples knew they had been filled because they spoke in tongues which they'd never learned. This was their evidence. It had never happened before. This was brand new, and as Jesus said, it flowed out of their bellies. They could speak in tongues whenever they wanted to. They could turn it on and off like a tap because it was a precious gift.

Many people question the validity of speaking

in tongues saying it's not necessary, but I haven't come across a scripture reference yet indicating that people didn't speak with tongues when the apostles laid hands on them to receive the gift. How else would the apostles be able to say they'd received it? We pray for many people to be healed, but how do we know our prayers have been answered unless there's evidence of a healing?

A Gift to Use or Abuse

The Holy Spirit is a gift. If it's been given then it's yours to use as and when you want to. You can neglect it; or you can use it every day and be constantly filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

I've witnessed some pretty remarkable baptisms in the Holy Spirit during my life time so have no doubt whatsoever that the proof of being baptised is speaking in tongues.

A young Jewish man named Howard started attending my church and he had lots of questions. My Pastor invited him round to his house to talk and realised that this young man hadn't been baptised in the Holy Spirit. Actually he didn't even know anything about the Holy Spirit, but when introduced to him allowed the pastor to pray that he

might receive. What an incredible filling he had. He was speaking in tongues at the top of his voice, almost ranting like a mad man. With his eyes tightly shut as he was going through this remarkable experience he went over to the Pastor's bookshelf and pulled out a book which he threw on the ground and started jumping and stamping on. He had no idea what he was doing.

Holy Spirit Guidance

The Pastor, although he'd seen some strange things during his ministry, was amazed to see this spectacle and stared at the book. It was entitled 'Demonology'! Well, after that incident he realised that the Holy Spirit didn't want that book on his shelf so he got rid of it. He also realised that the Holy Spirit didn't want him to be educated about devilish activity even though he'd been used in a supernatural capacity to cast out devils as well as heal the sick. The Holy Spirit was teaching him to leave those things to him to deal with.

Many years ago, when my Pastor first started teaching the sermon on the mount, I worked in an advertising agency. Hilary, the girl working right beside me would come in every Monday morning with yet another pathetic tale to tell of her wayward husband. I listened compassionately at first, giving

her a shoulder to cry on and telling her that God could change her life completely. I invited her to come to the church with me and she'd always promise to come the following Sunday, but never did. Yet when Monday morning came there she was with another tale of woe to tell.

People Do What They Want to Do

Well, one Monday I felt I'd heard enough and had just come to the end of my patience with her so stopped her midway through her story. I told her I didn't want to hear any more as she was just gossiping about her husband who wasn't there to defend himself and it wasn't fair on him. I'd already told her that God could change her life and had invited her to come to the church, but it was clear to me that she didn't want help, she just wanted to wallow in her suffering. People **do** what they **want to do!** I thought she might not be happy about what I said, but she was actually infuriated, and I thought, oh no, I've blown it now.

But would you believe it, whilst playing the organ on the church platform the following Sunday, I saw her walk into the church!

As it happened the Pastor was actually preaching about the Holy Ghost and gave an appeal at the end of his sermon for those who wanted to be

baptised to go into the back room to be prayed for. I was on the platform when the appeal was given so couldn't stop what happened next.

Hilary had joined the group of people heading off for the back room, but she hadn't even given her life to Jesus yet! I panicked thinking, "This is the wrong way round", and ran round to the back room as soon as possible to try to get her out, but was too late. A few minutes later she came out of the room looking dizzy, babbling away in tongues. She grabbed hold of my shoulders and started shaking me saying, "You didn't tell me it would be anything like this!", then started babbling away again.

What a Change!

Well, you wouldn't believe the change that came over her in work, she was a brand new person, and this sparked off a reaction in the whole firm. Other people asked if they could come to church too. Because Hillary knew nothing about the Bible I started holding Bible studies and prayer meetings in the lunch breaks for anyone who wanted to join us. I was in heaven!

However, my very best personal experience was with my eldest son. He was 14 when he started seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and had

been prayed for by many people, but wanted the experience to be real and not forced in any way. Because it was proving to be such a struggle for him to be filled he decided (even though he was going through his growth spurts) to fast on water for seven days. Nothing happened! A couple of months later he was afraid that God might have forgotten his request, so to prove to him that he was really serious about it he decided to fast for another week on drinks – but still nothing happened. I was distraught, never mind him, because I saw the effort he was making.

Talking About my Pastor

Soon after this Maurice's father (my beloved Pastor) died and as a family we went to his funeral in Southport. I brought the children home alone as Maurice was going to do some book-writing over the next few days at a friend's house. When I'd put Tamar and Izaak to bed I got chatting in depth with Nathan about his Grandpop, whom I'd always called Bro, saying how much he'd meant to me over the years I'd known him. Nathan seemed really motivated and blurted out,

“Well if Bro's gone, surely I need the Holy Ghost now more than ever!”

“Dead right you do!” I said, then pounced on

him and prayed that God would fill him.

Immediately something dynamic happened. It was like he'd been hit by a bolt of lightning. He opened his mouth and began babbling away in the most fluent tongues. He was red in the face as he started sweating, shaking, and sobbing all at the same time as he babbled away. He was absolutely drunk and didn't know how to control himself. I'd prayed for him many times before, so had other people who were used of God in this ministry, but that specific night was the night for my son to be filled. It was 11:45pm on the very day his grandfather was committed to the ground and God filled him.

Stir up the Gift

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is real. Don't let anyone kid you. I've seen and experienced the reality of it, and found that it's only those who haven't had the joy of this experience who put up objections concerning the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Once you have been baptised in this way, well, it's up to you to keep exercising the gift and continue being filled, because it's very easy to neglect what's been given. That's why the scripture says:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess;
but be filled (*be continually filled*) with the Spirit;
speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs (there's the speaking in tongues), singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:18-20

So, may God bless you, and inspire you to seriously and earnestly seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 5

Who killed Samson?

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, you are barren, and bear not: but you shall conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray you, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: for, lo, you shall conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And

Who killed Samson?

the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Judges 13:2-5 & 24-25

Because God had destined this child to fulfil a role during his growth in his mother's womb, and throughout his entire life, he was confined to a strict code of conduct. He was to live as a Nazarite, totally consecrated and devoted to God. It seems Samson willingly adhered to this restricted lifestyle as we know full well he never cut his hair all his life, so I can only assume he must have also been strict with his diet. He kept his body in subjection to the will of God because he knew he was special.

The Wrong Image

Whenever you see videos, or look at the pictures in a child's Bible portraying Samson, he's always depicted as Mr. Universe with muscles bulging out of his clothes, having a body so tough and strong you'd think it was made of steel. How else could he kill a lion with his bare hands or carry the four ton gates of Gaza on his back for 40 miles if this wasn't the case? But the Bible doesn't say he had an awesome physic or was naturally strong. Not once does it mention that his appearance was anything

other than ordinary.

No Mention of His Appearance

When talking about Saul who was God's choice to be the first king of Israel, the Bible says he was handsome, and tall, in fact head and shoulders taller than everyone else. We even have a description of what Goliath, a heathen Philistine, looked like, saying he was six cubits (that's ten feet) tall, and we have a good idea of his strength by how heavy his armour and weapons were before he'd even started to engage in battle. But so far as this man Samson was concerned, who was used mightily by God to do powerful acts of strength, there is no mention of his physical appearance other than the fact that he had long hair. But what the Bible does say is that the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times, so what I conclude from this is that it appears he only became strong when God's spirit came upon him.

For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

1 Corinthians 1:26

Why is this? Well, it's so that no flesh should glory in God's presence. So it appears Samson's a classic example of God's predestination.

God was Picking a Fight

We don't really choose whom we're attracted to – it's chemistry. But of all the girls Samson could have been attracted to it happened to be one of the daughters of the Philistines. This must have devastated his parents after all their care and attention to the details of Samson's separation as he was growing up, but they didn't realise this was of the Lord. God was picking a fight with the Philistines. Samson was sincere in his desire for this woman and married her, but during the very wedding feast trouble brewed.

Thirty Philistine men attended the feast and Solomon made a bet with them saying that if they could answer his riddle he'd give each of them a sheet and change of garment, but if they couldn't then each one of them would have to give him a sheet and change of garment. They all took up the bet but couldn't answer the riddle. The Philistines bullied his new bride saying that if she didn't get the answer out of Samson they'd burn her and her father's house with fire. She was petrified so spent the whole

seven days of the feast crying and begging Samson to let her in on the secret. Eventually her tears wore him down and he told her. So, when the Philistines told him the answer, he knew she'd betrayed him. Angered, he left her and went back to his parents. After he'd cooled down he returned with gifts to woo his bride back, but what a surprise awaited him. His father-in-law, thinking that Samson now hated her, had already given her to another man in marriage! Samson was livid! Read what he did.

And Samson went and caught 300 foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives. Then the Philistines said, Who's done this? And they answered, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife, and gave her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire. And Samson said unto them, Though you have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Judges 15:4-8

Whoa, the Philistines were really mad now! They surrounded the place called Lehi, so the Israelites living in the area asked them what was going on.

"We've come to bind that brute, Samson, after what he's done to us!"

So 3000 men of Israel went to the top of the rock to talk with Samson.

"Goodness me, Samson, you know the Philistines are ruling over us, what on earth have you done to them? We've come to bind you so that we can deliver you to them."

So, after Samson had made them promise they wouldn't personally harm him, he let them bind him with two brand new ropes.

And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

Judges 15:14

You see! It was when the spirit of God came upon him that he became supernaturally strong!

And Samson found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a 1,000 men with it.

Judges 15:15

Samson single-handedly killed 1,000 men! Well, he became a man of renown among the Israelites and judged them for 20 years because of this, but it seems the fight wasn't over.

Hiding in a Harlot's House

The Philistines were a pleasure loving, warlike society of pagans ruled by tyrants who continually threatened Israel's existence. They were an unscrupulous enemy. God put it in the heart of Samson to go to Gaza so he sneaked into the city and went into the house of an harlot. The Gazites recognised him so made a plan to surround the house and kill him the following morning. At midnight Samson stealthily sneaked out of the harlot's house, but as he went he took the doors of the gate of the city, plus the two posts with him, and carried them off, bar and all, upon his shoulders. He carried this massive burden from Gaza up to the top of an hill that's before Hebron, a distance of around 60 kilometres or 40 miles, and it's reckoned the weight of these was in the region of four tons.

This was such an audacious and spectacular thing to do! By taking the very gates he'd rendered Gaza defenceless against enemy attacks, and the

Gazites were fuming! Samson was hardly a fly in the Philistines ointment ... he was a whacking great elephant! And they'd have done anything to eliminate him.

His Strength Came From God

You know, it wouldn't have mattered if there were 10,000 Philistine soldiers ambushing him, they couldn't have defeated Samson because Samson's strength was not of this world; it was from God, it was divine.

No army could have defeated Samson no matter how many, or how strong, because no one can defeat God. Before his birth the angel prophesied that Samson would begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. He's even numbered among the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11.

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the

armies of the aliens.

Hebrews 11:32-34

So, I want to ask you a question. Who killed Samson?

Was it Delilah? Was it the Philistines?

Well actually, Samson destroyed himself!

A Sad Story

Samson's is one of saddest stories I've read in the Bible. All through his life he'd restricted his freshly desires to honour the commandments given specifically to him. He'd tasted no wine of any sort, not even the juice of the grape, nor any unclean foods, and he never cut his hair because of the call God had placed on him. He respected and honoured God, and judged Israel for 20 years. He was a fine, upstanding, godly citizen who was recognised by his fellow Israelites. But something happened to ruin his spiritual walk with God. He courted the enemy and fell in love with an ungodly woman. His life promised so much but he delivered himself to the lap of Delilah, a Philistine, and out of his own mouth unknowingly told the enemy the secret of his supernatural power.

I don't think, for one minute, that Samson had a problem with lust or a weakness for women. Quite the contrary. From what I've read and understood

in the Bible it appears to me that Samson was quite happy living a celibate life. After the trouble he'd encountered at his marriage feast, when his wife betrayed his confidence, and then she and her father's house were burned with fire by the Philistines, there's no more mention of women in his life until we hear of him going into the harlot's house. But even here there's no mention of a union between them. It could be that Samson went to her house rather than staying in an inn to pick a fight with the Philistines as there would be fewer questions asked.

This is exactly what the two spies sent by Joshua did when they went to spy out Jericho. But now we see that Samson has fallen in love with a Philistine woman. How on earth did he get into this situation?

Samson Falls in Love

I've seen this happen so often. People have an encounter with God and make a commitment to follow him. They do great for a while, but then the devil sends along someone who's worldly to befriend them, or be a boyfriend or girlfriend to them, and after only a few days they're right back where they started, trapped once again in the things God delivered them from.

Deceitful Delilah

Samson fell head over heels in love with Delilah and was so blinded by his love that he didn't realise she was just using him. The Philistine Lords had offered her great riches if she managed to get the secret of his great strength out of him, and waited within earshot for her to deliver him to them. Samson teased Delilah by saying various types of ropes would render him powerless, but when she tried them she realised he'd been playing with her. She tried every trick in the book to get him to talk, even calling into question his love for her by saying,

"How can you say, you love me, when your heart's not with me? You're just mocking me!"

Finally, when she pressed him daily with her words, and wore him down so that his soul was vexed unto death, he eventually opened his heart and told her.

"There has never come a razor upon my head; for I've been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

And when Delilah saw that he'd told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he's shown me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought

money in their hand. And she made Samson sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon you, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he didn't realise that the LORD was departed from him.

Judges 16:18-20

What a scary thing to read ... 'And he didn't realise that the Lord was departed from him.' You can be so taken up with the new person, or distraction that's come into your life, that you don't even realise God has bowed out gracefully and walked away because he knew he wasn't wanted.

Our Greatest Enemy is Ourselves

I just need to share something. Nobody can ruin your life except you do it with your own hands. You can blame it on God, on your parents, on the government, but the truth is you are your greatest enemy.

Even if your grandparents, or parents, have been evil role models, until you follow their example and press the trigger of that gun they've passed on to

you, it will not explode in your face. No devil, or witch, has the power to destroy you no matter how much they hate you, you're the only one who can kill yourself by your actions. You have to make the opportunity. Your greatest enemy isn't outside there in the world, it's inside you! If you fail, don't look at others to place the blame. Look inwards because what's killing you is inside of you.

What you yield yourself to will either kill you, or save you.

Holy Things to Dogs

If you continue yielding yourself to worldly friends and habits, that's what will destroy you both physically and spiritually. Samson gave holy things to dogs. His body was meant to be a temple of the Holy Ghost but he defiled it by having an intimate relationship with an ungodly woman. The Philistines were the enemies of God and Samson had joined himself physically and emotionally to them so entirely that he shared sacred things with Delilah. She lulled him to sleep then mercilessly sold him into the hands of the Philistine Lords who plucked out his eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and made him grind in the prison house. Samson had now become a trophy and laughing stock for the Dagon worshippers. Jesus was so wise when he said,

"Don't give that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and tear you to pieces." The godly light that had once been in Samson had literally been torn from him and he now walked in complete and utter darkness.

Don't Allow Anger to Manifest

You know, when Moses walked in meekness God defended him whenever he was attacked; but when Moses allowed anger to get the better of him it brought on his early death and prohibited him going into the promised land.

Goliath, that giant Philistine champion, couldn't hurt David when he was just a young stripling; but David's own adultery and premeditated murder later on in life brought about unending destruction in his whole family.

I'll just end with some great advice Paul gives in Ephesians concerning how we should conduct ourselves in this present evil world.

If so be that you have heard Jesus, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and

put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be angry, and sin not: don't let the sun go down upon your wrath: NEITHER GIVE PLACE TO THE DEVIL. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that is in need. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:21-32

Let's learn to live in, and love, this new culture God has graciously and mercifully given to us, and stop playing around with the world.

Chapter 6

Potty Training

Around 35 years ago Maurice and I used to be friendly with a couple who had children similar ages to our own. They had quite a large house with lots of grounds so the wife invited me to bring my children over so they could all play together. The wife was still at the hairdressers when I arrived so the husband welcomed us in. The faces of my two boys lit up as soon as they set eyes on their son and couldn't wait to get out of the car to start playing. I took my little two-year old daughter, Tamar, indoors and after explaining to the husband that I was potty training her, took off her nappy and set the potty down on the floor of the playroom, telling him,

"It's alright, she knows what she's supposed to

do. I'm just nipping to the loo so won't be a minute!"

Well, it's quite incredible what can happen in a minute. When I returned to the playroom the husband was holding out a sock to me which was full of poo!

What a Mess!

"Maybe you know what to do with this," he said.

I stared and tried to take in the situation. Apparently, the moment I'd left the room, Tamar had decided to do a poo but had completely missed the potty. Izaak, who was nearly four years older had come dashing in from outside just wearing socks on his feet and, after he'd stepped right onto the poo, had walked it into the carpet. Then, because he'd panicked, he tried to pull his sock off but was getting the poo all over his hands, so now he really was freaking out, grabbing hold of the door handle to get out of the room and leaving poo all over the door!

We'd been at their house less than five minutes and my kids had done so much damage. Talk about being embarrassed. I was mortified!

The husband handed me some cleaning materials so I immediately set about trying to clear up the mess, but as the carpet was a pastel blue colour I really couldn't get rid of the stain. I felt awful. Even after all my efforts at cleaning, that room could tell

the story, the slate had certainly not been wiped clean.

Children Make Mistakes

You know I've never forgotten that incident as it was such a vivid visual aid concerning life. Tamar was only two years old so couldn't be held accountable for missing the potty. Izaac was also very young, only six years old, and hadn't yet fully learned to not barge into rooms or watch where he was going. We expect children to make mistakes just because they're young and have to learn, but when we get older our character should have been formed so that we know how to behave and more is expected of us. We can't carry on using the potty in public, or go barging around without looking where we're going when we are grown up because this is not acceptable behaviour. We have to learn self disciplines and exercise self-control. We can't live self-indulgent, careless lives as adults, we have to live in consideration of others. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God, and love others. Loving yourself is not listed as one of the commandments, and as disciples of Jesus Christ we should know better. We have no idea where any of our mistakes, or unwise actions may lead.

God can forgive sins, no problem. That was his

plan all along both under the Old Covenant with all the animal sacrifices, and now with the New Covenant where Jesus has made a once and for all sacrifice to cover our sins. But the consequences, the stains left behind for everyone to see, are something entirely different. Sometimes no amount of cleaning and trying to cover up will hide our selfishness.

No Excuse

If you have truly received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour he has given you power to become a son of God, and like a good father God said, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people". So we have no excuse for not knowing what God expects from us. But how many married 'Christians', even those in the ministry, have allowed themselves to be seduced into committing adultery? And how many unmarried Christians have succumbed to worldly standards where fornication is concerned and ended up with an unwanted pregnancy, an abortion, or even a sexually transmitted disease? How many are angry without a cause and have a murderous spirit? Sin is rampant in the church of Christ and it's all due to rebellion because of selfishness.

King David is a classic example of this sad

situation. He was the King of Israel, and because he was in that position of authority God expected him to set an example of godliness and righteousness that his subjects could follow. For years David glorified God by his lifestyle in Israel, but when he was older he let his guard down and relaxed.

And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 11:1

David was the King, the figurehead. In those days Kings physically led their armies when they went out to war. But for some reason David sent Joab in his place to lead the battle whilst he stayed in the comfort of the palace. There's a saying, 'the devil makes work for idle hands', well the devil certainly took advantage of this situation.

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

2 Samuel 11:2

David was a man of action and had lived a really exciting life. He'd killed lions, bears, giants, and was renowned as a man of war. But he'd become tired and complacent, and there's nothing worse for a physical man than being bored. Taking it easy wasn't all it was cracked up to be and he was bored. It wasn't the middle of the night when he should have been sleeping, this was evening and he was sick of just lying on his bed with nothing to do, that's why he rose from off his bed to go for a walk on the rooftop.

Consequences

This action was so innocent, but the devil took full advantage and placed mega temptation in the way. David may have loved God with all his heart, but he certainly showed that he did not love his neighbour. He didn't only steal and commit adultery with the only wife Uriah had, but made sure Uriah was placed in the thickest part of the battle to secure his death when David found out Uriah's wife was pregnant with his child.

How could such a godly man do such terrible things? Well, it's easy to be self-centred and do wrong things when you think nobody is watching,

but the knock-on effects can be devastating. My little girl wouldn't have missed the potty if I'd have been watching her because I'd have seen what she was about to do and steered her in the right direction, which in turn would have meant my little boy wouldn't have stepped in her poo and spread it all over the room. The more secretive we become the more likely we are to do sinful things, and the more we indulge in sinful practices, the more knock-on effects there will be for others around us.

God Gives us Time to Repent

God in his goodness gave David time and space to repent, but David managed to blank out all he'd done, the adultery and the murder, until years later when Bathsheba, Uriah's widow whom he'd married, had given him three sons. When God thought David had had enough time indulging in self-denial he sent a prophet to remind him of his sin, and immediately the reality hit him.

And Nathan said to David, You are the man who has sinned. Thus says the LORD God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of

Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto you such and such things. Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house; because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them unto your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

2 Samuel 12:7-11

David begged God's forgiveness and God forgave him, but there were terrible consequences. He'd sown some really evil seeds and it was now time for him to reap. Being the king, David couldn't be taken to court and judged for his crime like a normal citizen as he was the ruling authority. But God judged him. God forgave his sin and he didn't have to die to pay for the innocent life he'd taken, but the child born to himself and Bathsheba through

his adulterous affair died in his stead. And David was never allowed to forget his crime because God said what he had done to his neighbour would return on his own head, the sword would never depart from his house, and his wives would be taken from him. He'd done things secretly but his punishment would be public for all to witness.

God is Hard on Rebellion

God can, and will, cover innocence and ignorance but he deals very severely with rebellion and stubbornness – that's knowing what is not permitted and yet still going ahead and doing it. In fact God said that in his eyes rebellion is just the same as witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. For these very sins God removed David's predecessor, Saul, from the throne. If David had not immediately repented when confronted with his sin years later, he too could have been removed. But he took his punishment like a man and walked humbly the rest of his life before God, knowing that whatever painful and disastrous situation came his way from now on it had been brought about by his own past wilfulness, and he never resisted the pressure. He wrote in one of his Psalms that the sacrifices God loves best are a broken spirit: and emphasised that God would not despise a broken

and a contrite heart.

One thing that I've often prayed is that I never, ever forget where I've come from or what the character of my old nature is like. Paul often spoke about what he was like before God invaded his life. He knew full well he was not worthy of his calling to be an apostle having once persecuted the church. He confessed openly he'd been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious: and that when Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners he didn't say, "I was the chief", he said "I am chief". Like David, Paul's sin was ever before him, and that's why he served his gracious and merciful God and Saviour with such zeal, because he whom has been forgiven much, loves much.

May God help us to grow up and become spiritually mature, that we may be responsible and know how to serve him in love and obedience rather than continually expecting him to cover up for us when we mess up time and time again. God has blessed us so much in our lives, wouldn't it bring joy to the heart of God if we would selflessly turn the tables and start blessing him instead?

Chapter 7

Who is my Neighbour

I'd like to talk about the story Jesus told of the Good Samaritan. In this passage of scripture it points out that a certain lawyer, with the intention of testing him, stood up to ask Jesus a question: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded by asking him, "What's written in the law? How do you read it?" The lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus congratulated him, "Good answer: do this and you'll have eternal life." But the lawyer, hoping to justify himself, asked a further question, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus tackled this question by telling a story:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever you spend more, when I come again, I will repay you. Which now of these three, do you think, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and you do likewise.

Luke 10:30-37

Have you ever asked a question then, when you've heard the answer, been sorry you ever brought up the subject in the first place? Well I'm sure this

lawyer must have been squirming by the time Jesus finished this little story.

Priests

Let's talk about the Priest first: Under the Levitical arrangements the office of the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, and to only one family of that tribe, the family of Aaron. Certain laws respecting the qualifications of priests are given in Leviticus. The book of Leviticus is actually the manual for the priests. There are ordinances also regarding the priest's dress, and the manner of their consecration to the office in Exodus. Their duties were manifold. They represented the people before God, and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the law.

Levites

The religious right of succession belonging to the firstborn son was conferred on the tribe of Levi, which was devoted to the service of the sanctuary. They were selected for this purpose because of their zeal for the glory of God. Moses and Aaron had belonged to this tribe. They were not included among the armies of Israel but were reckoned by themselves. They were the special guardians of the tabernacle. As being wholly consecrated to the service of the

Lord, they had no territorial possessions. Jehovah was their inheritance and for their support it was ordained that they should receive from the other tribes the tithes of the produce of the land. For this reason the Levites were scattered throughout the tribes to keep alive among them the knowledge and service of God.

Samaritans

The Samaritans, well this was quite another story.

In the time of Christ, Western Palestine was divided into three provinces, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Samaria occupied the centre of Palestine. It's called in the Talmud the 'land of the Cuthim,' and is not regarded as a part of the Holy Land at all. Therefore, religious feuding festered between the people of these two provinces and they would not have dealings with each other. It may be noticed that the distance between Samaria and Jerusalem, the respective capitals of the two kingdoms, is only 35 miles in a direct line. On one occasion Jesus needed to pass through Samaria on his way to Galilee, and it was there he met the woman at the well.

Then said the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews

have no dealings with the Samaritans.

John 4:9

So it's surprising that Jesus should bring these three people into one story to put across a godly principle. Jesus was addressing Jews when he told this story, so each one of them would either imagine themselves, or one of their countrymen, in this position of being beaten and robbed by bandits whilst on their way to do some business deal, Jericho being a trading town. It was what happened regularly on those roads, they were living in dangerous times.

It Was His Duty

Now, the priest would definitely have been expected to help, as they were from the chosen tribe to represent the people before God as intercessors. It would actually be the priest's bounden duty to come to the rescue. So, what stopped him?

It could be that he was on his way home after fulfilling obligations in Jerusalem and was very tired. Or, perhaps he had an appointment with some official in Jericho and needed to get there as soon as possible, and any delay would have made him late. For him it was important to have integrity; and punctuality was a virtue! So, no, he couldn't afford to be distracted from his purpose. The man

looked too ill to just help him to his feet and send him on his way. This looked like it could take up quite a lot of his time.

Those Special People

But, not to worry, the Levite was an even better choice to help the man, as they were scattered among the tribes to keep alive among them the knowledge and service of God. The Levites were known for their zeal for the glory of God and total consecration to the service of the Lord. That's why the other tribes paid them tithes, so that they could perform these duties unhindered with manual labours. These special people were even exempt from having to put their lives on the line when war broke out because of their role in the community. It was more than a duty to help this poor beaten man, it was rather an obligation to care for those providing for his own personal welfare. But maybe, here again, the Levite was on an errand and was tied to a tight schedule. He was too important a person to be waylaid by tending to one sick man. A whole community could be waiting for him. He needed to get his priorities right. This was a menial task which should be taken care of by somebody who was not so qualified as himself. He couldn't spare the time.

Have you ever heard the phrase: Proffered help

stinks?

You know, I've heard this parable preached many times but have never heard anybody talk about how the man who was robbed must have felt. How ironic that the very last person he would have wanted help from was this stranger who offered it. I'm sure in other circumstances he would not even have deigned to talk with the Samaritan, let alone allow him to touch him. The feuding that went on between these two nations was very strong and quite violent. But what choice did he have? Both the priest and the Levite had not only ignored him, but had passed over onto the other side of the road in an attempt to avoid him. He must have been stunned at their behaviour.

Hobson's Choice

He was faced with two choices: stay here and die, or accept proffered help from this Samaritan – which well & truly stank!

All the Jews listening to Jesus would have felt the indignity of the situation. The poor wounded man was suffering twice in this story, once at the hands of robbers, and again at the hands of this 'outcast'. Jesus knew how to choose his words and pick his characters. He was a master teacher, putting over a vital lesson.

Moved With Compassion

But you know this Samaritan also must have been on a mission, he could even have been on a tight schedule like the others, and would have been well aware of the risk involved with stopping on those dangerous roads to help someone who would be unable to help him fend off any prospective future attack. But he was moved with compassion for the wounded, bleeding man who was lying there half dead, and found it impossible to ignore his plight.

Getting down from his donkey he began to tend the man, pouring oil and wine into the wounds and binding them up. He then lifted him onto his own animal, and had to turn back to where he had come from in order to place him in an inn where he would be able to rest. This was really inconvenient. His plans had to be dropped because of an unforeseen situation. He gave the inn-keeper money for his immediate needs telling him that if more was required he would pay the deficit when he returned from his errand. He had not just reached out a helping hand, he had made a commitment to look after this Jew until he was well again.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, "You be perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect". We disregard this instruction thinking it an

unreasonable demand because we don't understand what perfection is. We tend to think perfection means being sinless, but it doesn't. Everyone who's ever lived, other than Jesus, has sinned, but the Bible makes mention of particular men, such as Noah and Job, who were called perfect. Jesus actually qualified what perfection meant in the few verses preceding his instruction

You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbour, and hate you enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Why?) That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Matthew 5:43-45

God is indiscriminate with his kindness and goodness. He doesn't discriminate between race, religion, politics, class, age, or whether you're rich or poor. God blesses all mankind and he's only a prayer away from the worst sinner who's ever lived.

The Samaritan, an enemy of the Jews, was commended for having compassion and providing help, but equally the Jew had to humble himself to

receive it.

God's Ways are in the Sea

In the Bible we can read that God didn't always send his holy prophets to help those in need, sometimes he sent ungodly people, and even unclean creatures to deliver his people from certain disaster.

Jesus is not only instructing us to be indiscriminate in our giving aid, but he's telling us we need to be indiscriminate in our accepting it also. Pride will never be considered a good reason for not giving help, and neither will it be considered a good reason for refusing to accept it.

Let's learn to drop all our barriers of discrimination so that we may be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. The reward we've been promised for loving our neighbour as ourselves is eternal life. That's a big reward!

Chapter 8

Should Christians Hate

(the Narrow Way)

I want to address this topic of hate as Believers seem to have focused so much on the love gospel that they are afraid to even look at the word, indeed, they have relegated it to mean something like dislike, or not to love in the same measure. But the very Bible which talks about the love which God displays being so intense that he gave his only beloved son to die for mankind, also tells us that God hates.

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, Esau have I **hated**.

Romans 9:13

David said:

Do not I **hate** them, O LORD, that **hate** you? And

am not I grieved with those that rise up against you? I **hate** them with perfect **hatred**: I count them my enemies.

Psalms 139:21-22

We can see this played out in the life of David when he heard the words uttered by Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 saying,

"I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."

David spoke to the men that stood by him, and said, "What's the reward for killing this Philistine, and taking away the reproach from Israel? And who is this uncircumcised Philistine anyway, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

David was livid. How dare this unbeliever come against the people who belonged to the true and living God! How humiliated this prize fighting, Philistine champion must have felt, armed to the teeth and kitted out in all his battle dress, when presented with nothing more than a mere youth, too young to fight in the army, armed only with a sling and pebble as his opponent.

He yelled as he cursed David by his Philistine gods.

Am I a dog, that you come to me with staves?
But David's zeal for the Lord had eaten him up
and he yelled back,

"You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will deliver you into my hand; and I won't only kill you, I'll take your head from you; and I'll give the carcasses of your Philistine army this very day to the fowls of the air, and the wild beasts; and all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly will know that the LORD doesn't save with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he'll give you into our hands.

1 Samuel 17:45-47

And God did get a great victory that day. David ran at Goliath whirling his sling above his head, and with a single pebble, slung with such speed and precision, hit the giant and sunk it into his forehead like a bullet. The giant fell forward on his face and David did exactly what he'd said he would do, he cut off the giant's head with his own sword!

That's how you dealt with the enemies of God under the Old Covenant. But if you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ you can't go round physically killing or taking revenge. That's God's domain and reserved for Judgement Day. So what did Jesus actually mean by what he said in this verse?

If any man come to me, and **hate** not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:26

We preach often of the love of God, but who teaches about the fear of the Lord? Don't you know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? That's what David taught his son Solomon in Proverbs. He told him to love the law of God because this would be a source of health to his body, mind, and spirit, but he also educated him about the things God hated. David instructed Solomon that if he had the fear of the LORD he would **hate** evil: and that evil came via people. When Jesus talked of what to hate he mentioned people specifically - father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even yourself - because it's people who manifest the things God hates such as pride, and arrogance, the evil way, the froward mouth, and these were the very characteristics David himself had learned to hate both in himself and people when they challenged and defied God. Jesus knew what and how to hate with a godly hatred.

But unto the Son he said, Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved

righteousness, and HATED iniquity; therefore God, even your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

Hebrews 1:8-9

In Proverbs 6:16 David lists six things that the LORD **hates**: he even went so far as to say the seventh was an abomination to him:

1. A proud look,
2. A lying tongue,
3. Hands that shed innocent blood,
4. A heart that devises wicked imaginations,
5. Feet that be swift in running to mischief,
6. A false witness that speaks lies,
7. He that sows discord among brethren (and this is the worst of all).

Some years back Maurice and I were preaching in Canada and had been invited to speak at a large church in Ontario. We'd visited and shared in this church before but now there was a new minister who'd taken over the pastorate. After the Sunday

morning service the new pastor and his church leaders took us out for a meal in a very plush, impressive hotel. We ordered our food and whilst we were waiting for the meals to arrive they brought us up to speed with what had been happening in the church since we'd been there last. I must admit I was very disappointed not to be meeting up with the previous pastor as he'd become a good personal friend, and even though we'd had contact with him via email, he hadn't mentioned that he'd left the church. But the new pastor was more than willing to fill us in with the details.

Not knowing that we actually had a personal relationship with the previous pastor, the new pastor told us the former pastor had been caught in a compromising situation with another male and there had been a terrible scandal. The more this man spoke, the more sick and agitated I got inside my stomach. My spirit was really disturbed and it made me feel terribly uncomfortable. I asked the pastor if he'd personally witnessed this act, but he said he hadn't, it was something he'd heard. I then asked if the former pastor had confessed to this sin, but he said he hadn't. I asked if he had proof of this accusation, but again he said he hadn't.

"So, you mean it's just a rumour that you're repeating to us?" I couldn't help it. I was so angered inside.

Love Cover a Multitude of Sins

I then told him how appalled I was to hear him, a pastor, repeat gossip to us as travelling ministers, especially when he had no proof of the accusation. Surely if they had been concerned for this brother they should have covered his sin, then fasted and prayed for the Lord to deliver him.

Well, as you can imagine, everyone was quiet for a while until somebody managed to change the subject and talk about something else. But I just couldn't sit there in silence listening to this verbal abuse. If God hates it when someone sows discord among brethren, surely we're supposed to hate it too. May God grant us holy zeal so we can cut these conversations dead and shame those who spread idle gossip. This type of talk murders people without actually sticking a physical knife into them. It destroys any good name they have and God hates it.

In the letters to the churches, the Church of Pergamos were commended for dwelling in the worst place possible, Satan's seat, whilst still holding fast his name and not denying his faith, even though one of their own members, Antipas, had been martyred. But then he pointed out their faults telling them to repent; or else he would come to them quickly, and

fight against them with the sword of his mouth.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I **hate**."

Revelation 2:14-15

It is clear from this scripture that whoever the Nicolaitans were, this church at Pergamos were guilty of these kinds of sins.

I researched this word Nicolaitans and found that it was a form of Aramaism. In this case, 'Aramaism' is not a Greek word but a 'loan' word, originating in Aramaic but spelled Greek.

The Aramaic word (nichola) means 'Let us eat!'. Thus the Greek word (Nicolaitans) was formed from the Aramaic combined with the Greek plural ending. So then, that would imply that the basic meaning of Nicolaitans would be 'let-us-eat-ers'.

The Book of Revelation must never be read in isolation from the Book of Acts and Paul's letters. In Acts we read that encouragement and instruction was sent to Gentile Believers who had been delivered from the bondage of paganism, and that's why the

conclusion of the letter reads as follows:

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that you abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well. Fare you well.

Acts 15:22-29

Once we realise the connection between 'Nicolaitans' and 'Let-us-eat-ers,' it's not difficult to see that this aberrant group of Gentile Believers were at odds with the decision of the Jerusalem Council and the will of God. They appear to have set aside the teaching of the apostles and were slipping back into their former pagan practices and idolatry.

How many of the New Age and Occult teachings have been welcomed in the churches today? I'll list a few examples for you to think about:

A Long List

Yoga, music with unbiblical lyrics, reiki and energy healing, giving self-glory instead of God-glory, 'love yourself', 'believe in yourself', Word of Faith/'name it and claim it', 'little gods' (in the New Age, the Bible verse 'be still and know that I am

God' is taken out of context, they are in training to become a 'little god'), 'co-creating with God', praying to angels, communicating with angels, Harry Potter acceptance and tolerance, astrology and horoscopes.

New Age practices are similar to alcoholism. They are progressive and people crave more and more intensity. They may start out with something that seems innocent, but it always leads to darker experiences. New Age is the devil's tool to infiltrate the Church. We must become equipped with wisdom and discernment so that we recognise and avoid New Age practices.

The other aspect of the Nicolaitans doctrine was segregation. Jesus, whilst on earth, set a wonderful personal example of how we're supposed to treat one another and conduct ourselves as brethren. We all know what good family life is like, the only difference between siblings should be age. They can argue and question one another on a daily basis but there's still that underlying knowledge that they're family. They fall out and fall in again very easily because they're exposed to each other's habits, good or bad. They may get mad at each other, but at the same time would defend one another to the hilt if any outsider tried to attack the family unit. No matter what their status in life: whether, doctor, or professor, or even a general in the army, they would

address one another using their first name.

Brothers and Sisters

Why is it that we find it so difficult in Christian society to treat one another as brothers and sisters rather than using fancy titles which make for distinction and higher ranking between us? This was what the Nicolaitans did, and God hated this practice.

The disciples were still struggling with this carnal attitude at the beginning of their walk with Jesus and we find there was controversy even in their camp.

And there was also a strife among the disciples, concerning which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But you shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that serves. For who is greater, he that sits at meat, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at meat? But I am among you as he that serves.

Luke 22:24-27

Jesus was saying that even though he really was their Lord and Master in every sense of the word, he was treating them as his brothers, and lowered himself even further by actually being a servant to them when he washed their feet. If Jesus, the very one we're trying to emulate can have equality in relationship with his disciples and us, then surely we can copy his example and not try to pull rank over one another.

Where do all these clerical collars, and special clerical robes that people in evangelical circles wear come from anyway? It certainly isn't something advocated in the New Testament. In fact Peter, who was the apostle Jesus established as a pillar in the church, exhorted the elders (meaning those whom we inaccurately call pastors today) by saying in 1 Peter 5:2-3: Feed with good spiritual food the flock of God that is among you, exercise oversight not because it's your job or duty, but willingly; not because you're fond of dishonest gain or are greedy for profit, but with an eager attitude because it gives you fulfilment and satisfaction to see them growing in God; and don't act like lords over those entrusted to you, but be godly examples to the flock, not only preaching the word but practicing what you preach.

But there's something else God hates so much

it actually makes him vomit, complacency. God absolutely detests it. Jesus said to the Laodicean church:

So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth.

Revelation 3:16

There's a doctrine going around at the moment emphasising that 'God is Good' and for this they use a proof text in the Old Testament.

And the LORD passed by before Moses, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin ...

Exodus 34:6-7

But they omit the rest of verse 7 which says:

...And that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

If only one side of God's character is taught then we are giving a wrong view of God. He himself made a proclamation stating that he had

two extreme sides to his character, one of intense mercy and forgiveness, and the other of terrifying justice and vengeance. Many people preach as though God only displayed the fearful side of his character in the Old Testament, but then changed when Jesus came on the scene to being benevolent and unconditionally loving. But this gives a false image of God as Paul clearly shows in Romans and Hebrews when he says:

Behold therefore the goodness **and** severity of God.

Romans 11:22

Our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:29

We must hunger and thirst to be righteous, that is to do what is right and pleasing in God's sight, so that we will be vindicated by Jesus when we stand before him.

We mustn't be contaminated with the traditions or doctrines of men which tell us that God loves us just the way we are. Yes, if we're the children of God, then God does love us, but he loves us too much to leave us as we are, he wants to conform us into the image of his obedient son Jesus Christ with whom he was well pleased. If we're not seeking

first the kingdom of God **and his righteousness**, then we'll be preoccupied with ourselves, and our own interests. We'll be lovers of ourselves rather than lovers of God, feeling entitled because we've received God's free gift of forgiveness.

Feeling Entitled

The children of Israel felt entitled. They'd been delivered out of bondage in Egypt, seen God's mighty power and wonders, were fed and watered every day, their clothes and shoes never wore out, they experienced miracles every day, but only two out of all those original adults he'd rescued from Egypt reached the promised land. God destroyed all the rest in the wilderness because they had no zeal for him.

God hates complacency and this carnal, worldly attitude, which is satisfied with going to church at the weekend and living like the world during the week, in other words living with one foot in both camps. This lukewarm-ness makes God vomit. Ezekiel 16:49 doesn't say the sin of Sodom was homosexuality, it says their sin was pride (which is self-elevation), fullness of bread (self-satisfaction), and abundance of idleness (only themselves to be concerned about all day long), neither did they care about the poor and needy.

God Hates Complacency

The Sodomites were like kids born with silver spoons in their mouths who felt 'entitled'. Homosexuality was just a consequence of their decadent lifestyle. They didn't want to retain God in their knowledge, so God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, because God hates complacency and self-indulgence. Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.

David wrote:

I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.

Psalms 119:113

What are vain thoughts? When we talk about vanity today we think of someone looking in the mirror all the time, but that's not what this means. These thoughts are ambivalent, divided, half-hearted: meaning someone is simultaneously experiencing or expressing opposing or contradictory feelings, beliefs, or motivations.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing

wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James 1:5-8

Because you have vain (indecisive) thoughts, you'll pray vain (indecisive) prayers. And if you're alternately having one opinion or feeling, and then the opposite, you can't be trusted by God or man.

In his letter Peter said that judgement must begin at the house of the Lord. The Church in Laodicea wasn't the only church to be criticised. This is what Jesus said to the Church in Thyatira:

Notwithstanding I have a few things against you, because you suffer (you allow) that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins

and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Revelation 2:20-23

Why Run the Risk?

Why run the risk of being in the great tribulation along with others who are serving false gods? And you must remember that in Colossians 3:5 Paul calls covetousness idolatry. Covetousness is the immoderate desire to possess something, especially wealth, to satisfy your flesh. Anything diverting or pulling you away from serving the Lord your God should be seen for what it is – a threat, and should be hated in such a way that you cut off your connection. David said:

"I will set no wicked thing before my eyes: I **hate** the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me."

Psalms 101:3

It wasn't the people David hated, it was their deeds. Pray for the people, but don't make friends of evil people, because evil communication corrupts good morals. Find godly people, those who will build you up and provoke you to increase in faith and zeal for God, and stick to them like glue.

Chapter 9

Disciples Must Leave or Forsake

The emphasis of this particular little message is on the word 'disciple'.

In Luke 14 Jesus told people to sit down and count the cost before they committed themselves to discipleship because if they couldn't finish what they'd started they wouldn't be considered worthy of securing a place in the kingdom of God when he comes back to reign on the earth for 1,000 years.

Jesus never minced his words. When asked tough questions he not only gave an honest reply, many times he'd respond with tough answers. He never made his call to discipleship palatable for the sake of more converts. He spelled out the cost and

fed people meat not milk, but if they couldn't chew or swallow the meat he didn't push it down their throats because discipleship is optional. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that those who suffer with Christ will reign with Christ. To secure a place in God's kingdom on earth is not faith-based like salvation, it's works-based and totally dependent upon whether we've obeyed the commandments of Jesus or not.

There is a Cost

The free gift of God for those who have faith to believe is salvation and forgiveness of sins, but reigning with Christ when he sets up his kingdom on earth is another matter altogether and there's a massive cost to every individual who hopes to inherit such a prize.

And every one that has **Forsaken** houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Matthew 19:29

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or

wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

Mark 10:29

Matthew and Mark were not talking about leaving or forsaking because circumstances at home were difficult and those wanting to be disciples weren't able to get along with family members. The reason for leaving or forsaking was purely for the sake of the gospel and the call God had placed on their lives. Sometimes they would have to leave or forsake a profession, or a circle of friends, because they weren't compatible with what God had asked them to do.

The thinking of the world is opposite to the thinking of Christ, because the world is obsessed with pleasure and self-satisfaction. Jesus was tempted in every area like we are but he denied himself what he wanted so that he could please God and do only his will. If we're to be disciples of Jesus we have to learn to deny ourselves as we can no longer live self-indulgent lifestyles, constantly seeking personal gratification. Our bodies are now temples of the Holy Ghost so we must do everything we can to keep

them clean and separate from anything ungodly.

Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

If we can't give up the things we call vices, things which are blatantly wrong and sinful, how will we ever deny ourselves things which are legitimate and not sinful, but don't fit in with what God has planned for us such as an ambition, a career, or a potential marital status?

In the scriptures above the Greek word used for both **left** and **forsake** is **aphiemi** (af-ee-ay-me), but for some reason the translators of the Authorised King James Version of the Bible used different words to interpret their meaning. I firmly believe these original translators who lived 400 years ago were inspired by the Holy Spirit because they were actually martyred for bringing the word of God to

ordinary folk. It cost them their lives.

Not for the Fainthearted

Discipleship is not for the faint hearted and Jesus made people aware of the cost before enlisting them. When the Bible talks of a certain scribe coming to Jesus saying, "Master, I'll follow you wherever you go", Jesus considerately replied, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." He spelled out for him the fact that his was such a focused life he wouldn't be getting attached to anything in this world. Marriage and family life was not on the agenda for Jesus, he needed to have a single eye to accomplish the mission God had given him. And if anyone wanted to follow his lifestyle, but backed out when the going got tough, they wouldn't be fit for the kingdom of God.

You can't offer your services to God, you actually need the call to be a disciple as the cost is too great and God knows that not everyone can pay the price. But when we are called God puts us through the training to see if we can willingly leave all for him. If the reason you're leaving is because you're trying to escape from something, or trying to escape from somewhere, then it's not a sacrifice and costs you nothing. God's trying to find out how much you

love him and how far you're willing to go for him.

Persecution – Par for the Course

What a blessing and mercy of God when whole families are serving God together, but sadly this is not always the case. In many countries believing in Jesus Christ is dangerous so Believers have to flee for their lives due to terrible persecution and violence even from members of their own family. Yet despite all the persecution and cost involved Jesus Christ has true disciples in these countries, people who'll go through great hardships, and even endure imprisonment and torture for their faith because they've found their Lord and Saviour to be worth serving.

Jesus talks about leaving and forsaking our nearest and dearest as though it's something he just takes for granted when accepting his call. So this is very challenging for those living in the West who are not necessarily faced with this type of opposition. If you want to live a comfortable life contrary to the will of God you will have no lack of friends or companions, even in Christian circles, because Jesus said that many are on the broad way which leads to destruction (the Greek word 'apoleia' conveys utter ruin not the lake of fire). But one thing is certain, if you want to respond to the call of discipleship you'll have to leave and forsake somewhere along

the way because Jesus himself said this path you are to travel is very narrow and only few find it. If you can't walk away from material things or people who hinder your walk with God, how will you be able to give your life when things really get tough and persecution is all over the world? Jesus throws out this challenge:

Whosoever he be of you that **forsakes** not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:29

He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 10:37

I think the time when leaving cost me the most was when I became a mother. I'd been in the ministry for 25 years already and because I didn't know what motherhood entailed my husband and I continued to take touring engagements when my son was only ten weeks old. We went to America for four weeks, then after a short break went to Holland for five weeks. Because music was at that time a major part of our ministry I was kept extremely busy singing every night of our intensive tours, and because my little baby was so unsettled I'd often have him

strapped to me in a baby sling as I sang.

A Stiff Test for Me

I remember one particular engagement we had in a Dutch town right near the Belgium border. We were staying with a family and the wife suggested that I left my five months old baby with her in their home so I could go to the meeting and minister free of responsibility. I can't tell you how I resisted this suggestion. Nathan was entirely dependent upon me as I was breast-feeding him. I made all sorts of excuses explaining why this would be impossible. Maurice was delighted with her suggestion as he knew how exhausted I was and did his utmost to get me to take up her offer.

I was so scared! The wife had a disability and couldn't walk. Nathan didn't know her. I didn't know how long I'd be away from him. I felt so stressed. But she kept putting my mind at ease saying she was a mother herself and had older daughters at home to help her. She suggested I expressed some milk so she could bottle feed him if necessary.

Well, I finally gave in and left Nathan, but contrary to what everyone said this certainly did not relieve my stress. I'd only had my baby for five months and the love I had for him was unbelievably strong. I felt lost without him. I beat myself up for

abandoning him. What if he was hungry? He'd never fed from a bottle before! And because I was breast feeding so regularly the protective pads I was wearing couldn't contain the leaking milk so I had big wet patches on my blouse which I did my best to conceal. What an ordeal!

Not a Problem

I was so anxious to get back to my baby that we hardly spoke to anyone after the meeting. As the car pulled up outside the house I jumped out and looking through the window into the front room I saw to my absolute astonishment the wife lying down on the sofa, jumper up, and Nathan lying face down on her belly, fast asleep.

I rushed in and asked if he'd eaten.

"No, he's had nothing!" She said.

I hid myself in a corner and tried to breast-feed him, but he was too sleepy and didn't want me.

"He's been asleep since you left", she gently said.

That had been hours ago, yet when he was with me he'd be waking up every half hour! My poor little baby must have been picking up on my stress and exhaustion.

Well, that was the first time I had to leave my child, but it broke something in me. I realised God could take care of those I loved dearly if I obeyed his

call and left them in his hands. He only asked me to leave them because I'd be coming back to them, and thank God I was able to continue travelling and serving God in the ministry even with three children. You know we forget that people leave their wives, children, father, and mother every day to go out to work for their living without thinking twice about it.

Jesus told us to leave our nearest and dearest for his sake, and the gospel's, and we would not miss out on anything, but would receive an hundredfold now in this time, with persecutions (because we'll be heavily criticised by worldly minded people for our actions) and in the world to come we'll have eternal life.

The Tests Keep Coming

When Jesus was driven of the Spirit of God into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil it says that after fasting for 40 days the devil unsuccessfully tried his best to make Jesus sin against God. But then it records that Satan **left** Jesus for a while. Left because he was going to come back later to tempt him again. Well, that was the account in the gospel of Mark where the word **left** was used, but why did that Greek word in Matthew get translated as **forsake**?

And every one that has **forsaken** houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Matthew 19:29

I think there's quite a difference between leaving someone and forsaking someone, whatever the original word was the translation certainly sounds stronger. I wouldn't dream of walking out of the door saying, "I'm just forsaking for work", instead of, "I'm just leaving for work". There's a whole world of difference in their meanings.

If an animal falls in a pit you can leave it and return with help to rescue it; or you can forsake it and never return, leaving it to get out of the situation itself, or die.

And Jesus said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but you go and preach the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:59-60

We must understand the culture of God. He expected family to take care of family. The first commandment with promise was honour your

father and your mother that your days may be long on the earth. When David was on the run from King Saul and had escaped to the cave Adullam his family came to him in real distress, as being related to David they were also in danger. So David asked the king of Moab to let his parents stay under this king's protection until he knew what God was going to do with him.

Worse Than an Infidel

In 1 Timothy 5 Paul instructs children and nephews to take care of their widowed mothers and aunts, saying that if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Because of this we have to realise what it cost Jesus to serve God. He was Mary's eldest son and was known as a carpenter. We hear nothing of Joseph after the incident in the temple when Jesus was twelve years old and it's assumed Joseph was no longer living.

So, in order for Jesus to follow the call of God on his life, he had to forsake his mother, his brothers, and his sisters. He abandoned them to preach the gospel because from then on he was on the road with his disciples and never returned to live with his family.

Who is my Mother and my Brothers

There was a day at the beginning of his ministry when the scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out devils using the power of Satan, and it so happened that whilst he was answering this accusation someone came to tell him his mother and brethren stood outside desiring to speak with him. They couldn't understand what had gotten into him to behave in such a way. He'd lived with them for 30 years and they'd never seen him act like this before. It's possible they could have come as a family to try to talk some sense into him as he was upsetting the religious rulers.

And Jesus answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Mark 3:33-35

I can't imagine how Mary must have felt hearing those words.

Forsaken

Not only did Jesus forsake his nearest and dearest

for the sake of preaching the gospel, but he also experienced what it was like to be forsaken, because when he had reached his most vulnerable point, when he was hanging on the Roman cross, God abandoned him. God not only let him suffer alone, but also let him die without rescuing him. He could easily have intervened, but he had to forsake his beloved son for the sake of his plan of redemption, and I don't think for one moment God found that easy to do. Even God knows personally the cost of forsaking for the sake of the kingdom.

Let the Dead Bury the Dead

So now we have Jesus telling this young man he'd called to follow him to forsake his aged father and let the dead bury their dead. He was saying, they are not your responsibility any more. Let those who are spiritually dead, or who have no desire to follow me, be consumed with the affairs and cares of this life. You have been commissioned by Almighty God to preach the gospel.

You know, we forget that people forsake their wives, children, father, and mother every day to enlist in the army and go to war without thinking twice about it. Some people even consider this to be really noble and brave, but very often these soldiers don't even know why they're fighting, or dying.

They've had a call from their country and they just follow orders. C.T. Studd, that Famous Missionary, had to forsake his wife when he told her he was going to Africa and she'd never see him again.

Paul was a very privileged man in the flesh.

If any other man thinks that he has good reason to trust in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Philippians 3:4-6

Quite apart from all this he was a Roman citizen. But Paul turned his back on it all. He forsook everything, including all his qualifications, so that he could answer the call of God to preach the gospel. There was no turning back. That's why Jesus advocates so strongly the need to sit down and think about the cost before we commit ourselves to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. At the end of his life Paul said he wasn't disobedient to the Heavenly vision.

If you decide to answer the call to be a disciple of Jesus Christ there's no turning back, but the rewards are tremendous.

Chapter 10

Disciples Must Hate

The teachings of Jesus may be easy to read and discuss, but putting them into practice is another thing altogether. I've already dealt with the fact that to be a disciple you must both leave and forsake, but now we read of another scenario in Luke 14 which was entirely different.

Jesus went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, and they watched him. They couldn't help it, they were always watching and waiting for an opportunity to catch him out to bring an accusation against him. Jesus knew how they felt about him but wasn't intimidated. There he saw a certain man which had the dropsy so Jesus, speaking to the lawyers and Pharisees, asked them,

"Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?"

They held their tongues, so Jesus healed the man, and said to them,

"Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?"

Jesus Humbled Himself

Jesus had embarrassed them so again they didn't answer him. They knew they'd all help an animal, but he'd exposed their callousness for not having compassion on a fellow human being.

Life must have been extremely difficult for Jesus, for he humbled himself to such an extent that he fulfilled only God's desire through his physical human body. Jesus took every opportunity to show God's love, mercy, and tenderness only to be constantly resisted and thwarted by these religious, hypocritical, self made men who were so steeped in dogma that they couldn't discern between the law of God and the traditions of the elders. How Jesus must have hated with a righteous hatred the hearts and attitudes of these wicked men who insisted on representing a false God to Israel.

When challenging the scribes and Pharisees, or the lawyers, Jesus always used the law of God. That's why he asked if it was lawful to heal on the sabbath

day. Now Jesus used the law again to challenge them by telling them a story, saying:

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.

First one said to him, "I've bought a piece of ground, and need to go and see it: please let me be excused."

Then another said, "I've bought five yoke of oxen, and I need to prove them: please let me be excused."

Finally another said, "I've just married a wife, so I can't come."

Exceptions to the Rule

This was all in direct reference to Deuteronomy 20 regarding the excuses given when the men of Israel were called up for the army and expected to fight for their country. Anyone who had these reasons were excused from going to war and relieved of duty. The religious leaders knew this. But then Jesus went on to say that the master of the house was angry at these responses. This was a feast they were being invited to, not a battle! The religious leaders weren't only refusing to listen to Jesus personally, but were blocking others with their envy and incessant criticism of everything he did.

Jesus continued his story by saying:

The master of the house said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. But none of those men who were bidden and made excuses shall ever taste of my supper."

God hates religion. It seems Jesus left the Pharisee's house heavy hearted for the next verses say:

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and **hate** not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:25-26

Whoa ... these are really strong words! What on earth does he mean by **hate!** That's far stronger than leave or forsake. Surely he can't literally mean **hate!** Well, yes, he does! This is what it says in the actual law of God handed down to Moses:

"If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son, or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend, which is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known, you, nor your

fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto you, or far off from you, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; you shall not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall your eye pity him, neither shall you spare, neither shall you conceal him: but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones, that he die; because he has sought to thrust you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Deuteronomy 13:6-10

Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you go, lest it be for a snare in the midst of you: but you shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: for you shall worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call you, and you eat of his sacrifice; and you take of their daughters unto your sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make your sons go a whoring after their gods.

Exodus 34:12-16

God was Pleased with his Zeal

In Numbers chapter 25 we read that when Israel were abiding in Shittim the Israelite men were not only sexually defiling themselves with the Moabite women, but were also sacrificing, feasting, and bowing down to their gods. This angered Jehovah so much that he plagued Israel and thousands of God's people died. When one of the Israelite men blatantly brought a Moabite woman into the Israelite camp and openly took her into his tent.

Phinehas the priest was so incensed at this outrage that he followed them into the tent and thrust them both through with a javelin during the very act, and the plague immediately ceased. God was so pleased by this display of zeal for his name's sake, that his anger was turned away from consuming his people in his jealousy, and he made a personal covenant of peace with Phinehas.

Jesus was living under the Old Covenant when he spoke these words. God was, is, and always will be, a jealous God who won't stand for anything or anyone getting in the way of his people having a relationship with him. In the Old Testament it called for the death sentence, just like it does

with the Muslims today. Jesus was not advocating that we literally kill members of our family who would try to turn our hearts to serve false gods, but he's certainly telling us to **hate** every false way and strongly oppose words and actions that would entice or persuade us to deny our God. Indeed, after Jesus' death and resurrection Jude writes:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend (*that word means - struggle, fight, combat, oppose*) for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness (*unbridled lust, shamelessness*), and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:3-4

Paul upholds these instructions when writing his letters to the churches.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;

Hebrews 10:23

False brethren were brought in unawares, who came in privately to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Galatians 2:4-5

Paul wouldn't even give these people the time of day to debate with them.

A few years ago I was asked to hold a ladies conference in Africa. Before inviting me up to the platform the lady pastor, who was both hosting and convening the meetings, encouraged the women gathered by telling them the Bible stated the man was the head, but the woman was the neck. I couldn't believe I'd heard correctly, but she said it again, and all the women whooped and clapped their hands with glee, believing it was their God given right to control their men.

When I was called to the platform I spoke to the ladies saying, "The man is the head and the woman is the ...? I waited for their response and a few women called back, "Neck!"

I asked again, "The man is the head and the woman is the ...?" This time more joined in with the response, "Neck!"

The Same Response

I asked the third time, "The man is the head and the woman is the ...?" This time their response, "Neck!" was thunderous, and was accompanied by loud whoops and clapping. Wow, these ladies could get really excited.

When they had all calmed down I asked them to turn with me in their Bibles to Genesis to see for themselves that God had made the first woman from Adam's rib, not his neck, and explained that women had an entirely different function. We also read together how God had told Adam that he would now rule over his wife, and that was the God given order. I really didn't intend to insult or offend the lady pastor but I realised these dear people had been taught wrongly and didn't know God's order for family life. I taught many things that first session, showing them from the Bible, which I knew to be revelation for these dear people.

At the end of that meeting I wondered how the lady pastor would react, but I didn't need to worry. She came to me as quickly as she could asking, "How did it happen?"

"How did what happen?" I asked.

"Well, you showed us from the Bible that the woman is the rib, not the neck, so how did it happen

that we believed a lie?"

Believing a Lie

She wasn't offended, she was shocked she'd taken on board something which wasn't true and had taught the lie to others without realising it.

I explained to her there are many false doctrines being taught from pulpits today. Preachers often repeat things they've heard from others without first checking it with their Bible, and simple minded churchgoers accept everything the preachers say as gospel truth.

Did you know that the Bible is the best selling book of all time? Over five billion copies have been sold and Google says the average household has four Bibles. The problem is that very often they're just collecting dust as people don't read them. If Believers would only read the Bibles they owned they would be armed against false doctrines and traditions of men. King David said, "Your word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you." My dear pastor used to say, "Preach truth to your congregation and they'll easily be able to spot the lie."

God is a jealous God and doesn't want anyone to steal those who are his. Jesus didn't only promise that no man shall pluck his sheep out of his hand,

but he also said, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." What security!

Discipleship is Radical

How would God feel if we had such a love for him that we would be jealous for him like he is for us? A love that would do battle, and oppose, and even tear down anything that tried to jeopardise our relationship with him. This is what Discipleship is all about. This is what Jesus is calling for. It's wonderful when those with pure hearts are exposed to truth and want to change right away, but sadly not everyone reacts in this way. Jesus was always opposed by the religious bigots, and Paul the apostle bore the marks in his body from the many beatings he suffered for defending God's truth. If we're going to hate every false way so that we can be a Disciple of Jesus Christ it's going to take everything we've got.

Chapter 11

Coming to Terms With Failure

Many years ago Maurice was preaching a sermon entitled 'Thou shalt not kill' from the sermon on the mount, and this was the section of the scripture passage he used:

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:23-25

Maurice and I have been through the sermon on the mount many times over the years, but this time I felt really convicted because I remembered I had a

book on my shelf belonging to somebody who lived a couple of hundred miles away which I'd held on to for years as we'd never had the opportunity to revisit them.

I Was So Ashamed

I felt too embarrassed to return the book as I'd borrowed it without asking permission, thinking initially it wouldn't be long before we saw them again and I could put it back on the bookshelf. But now that God had pricked my conscience I felt awfully uncomfortable. I was so ashamed that I wrote a little anonymous note saying I was really sorry for borrowing the book without asking, then posted the book in another district so that the postmark couldn't be traced back to me. Can you imagine how embarrassed I felt when the following Christmas I received a Christmas Card with a little note saying, "Thank you for returning the book, we knew you had it all along. Have a blessed Christmas, we love you"? I was mortified.

There's always something God can put his finger on in our lives if only we'll open ourselves up to his scrutiny. Our problem is that we can't see our faults and failings because we always have a reason for why we do what we do, and justify all our faults. I justified the fact that I was a thief by telling myself I'd put the

book back next time I paid them a visit. I didn't realise there wouldn't be a next time so ended up keeping the book. Very often when we do something sinful we refuse to acknowledge our wrongdoing, push it under the carpet, and forget all about it. I hadn't even realised that my friends knew it was me who'd taken the book, and they must have been hurt and offended by my action because they hadn't forgotten.

God Hides His Face

Sadly, we don't only hurt people, God gets offended by what we do. He sees all, he knows all, and he gets very pained that we have no consideration for his feelings. In fact, he gets so upset that he hides his face from us and ignores our prayers until we put our wrongs right.

But your iniquities have separated between you
and your God, and your sins have hid his face
from you, that he will not hear.

Isaiah 59:2

In Genesis 32 we read that after Jacob had left Laban and travelled back to his home town he went very cautiously because 20 years previously he'd tricked his father into giving him the blessing which rightfully belonged to his brother, Esau. He

knew he had to try to make amends for his wicked behaviour so sent ahead of him gifts of oxen, asses, flocks, menservants, and women servants to soften Esau up before he came face to face with him. But then word came back to him that Esau was already on his way to meet him with 400 men, and Jacob was scared out of his wits. He devised a plan to split his flocks, herds, and camels into two bands so that if Esau killed one band the others could run for their lives.

Jacob Begs God to Protect Him

Then he prayed to God, addressing him as the God of his father Abraham, and God of his father Isaac, the God who had spoken to him telling him to return to his country and kindred promising he would deal well with him. He begged God to deliver him from the hand of Esau because he greatly feared he hated him so much he would kill him.

Then he split his family up into four bands and sent them all on ahead of him, and when he was left completely alone the Bible says that a man came and wrestled with him all night until the breaking of the day.

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled
a man with him until the breaking of the day.
And when he saw that he prevailed not against

him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And the man said, Let me go, for the day breaks. And Jacob said, I will not let you go, except you bless me. The man asked him, What is your name? He answered, Jacob.

Genesis 32:24

Hosea the prophet identifies the man who wrestled with Jacob as an angel sent from God. Why then did this angel ask Jacob, "What is your name?" Surely he must have known Jacob's name!

We need to remember that the last time Jacob had been with members of his family he had deceitfully posed as his brother, and even told his father that his name was Esau so that he could steal the blessing of the firstborn son which rightfully belonged to his older brother. He had procured this blessing with a false identity from his blind father who was convinced he was at death's door, and Esau was so angry with Jacob for cheating him that he swore he would kill him the first opportunity he got after his father had died. That was why Jacob had initially run away from home.

God never forgot what Jacob had done, even though Jacob had put it out of his mind. God now wanted Jacob to identify himself clearly because he

needed to know whom he was addressing – Jacob, or the liar going under an assumed name.

“I’m Jacob,” he said.

Now he admitted to God and to himself that he was both a liar and a thief God could bless him and change his name from Jacob, which means 'twister', to Israel, which means 'God prevails' (name in the Bible denotes character), but only honesty about his failures and weaknesses gave him power with God and with men.

And he said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince have you power with God and with men, and have prevailed.

Genesis 32:28

Some years ago, whilst praying with a group of people in a prayer meeting, I saw this vision:

I could see a worm standing up on its tail clothed like a man wearing a hat, a coat, and glasses, and he was standing with a group of men acting just as they did, conversing with them, and feeling equal to them. He didn't know he was a worm; the men did, but nobody pointed it out. The men were in small groups having fellowship together. As the worm shuffled to the different groups he

heard them discussing people in the Bible and identified himself with the characters. When one group spoke about Abraham and said that he was a friend of God, the worm thought, "Yes, I'm a friend of God!" When another group spoke about Moses and referred to the fact that he was the meekest man on the earth, the worm looked inwardly and thought, "Yes, I'm just like Moses, I'm meek!" He even prayed with one of the groups and spoke to God on a man to man basis, and yet he was only a worm.

I saw God looking down from Heaven at the worm but instead of disgust and indignation I saw pity on his face. He lowered a mirror and put it right in front of the worm. At first the worm had no idea that what he saw in the mirror was a reflection of himself, but after making a few gestures and seeing the worm in front of him do the same, slowly it dawned upon him that he was looking at his own reflection. He'd never seen himself before and fell flat on his belly to the ground at the feet of everyone in the room. His hat fell off, his glasses went flying, his coat buttons burst open and the coat sank to the floor. All his disguise had been stripped from him revealing he was just a worm, wriggling and squirming

on the ground.

But as God looked at the worm in his real, unpretentious state, compassion seemed to fill his soul and love flowed out of him for this low creature. He joined the head of the worm to its tail and made a circle of it, then he placed the worm upon his finger like a ring and with that finger pointed and cast out devils.

You know, we read, and some of us can even quote this scripture verbatim:

For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the **foolish things** of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the **weak things** of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and **things which are despised**, has God chosen, yes, and **things which are not**, to bring to nothing things that are. (*Why?*) Just so that no flesh should glory in his presence."

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

In Genesis it says:

"GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great

in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he'd made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."

Genesis 6:5

We agree with what the Bible says, but we don't actually believe it. We can't accept that we're foolish, weak, base, despised, and nothing, because it doesn't make us feel good. We have to build up our self-esteem, and self-worth, otherwise we'll feel inferior and of no value. Well I've got news for you: God says there's no good thing in the flesh! And it's for that very reason that God sent the flood and destroyed the first earth he made.

I was talking with a very proud and pompous Christian some years back discussing the passage of scripture which says, 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' She agreed that when it said we're all sinners it also included her, but when I asked if she could bring to mind any of her sins her face looked totally blank. This woman was so full of anger, criticism, and unforgiveness, yet I could see clearly that she was completely blind to any of her faults.

Seeing Through God's Eyes

God can't change us unless we'll take a good,

honest look at ourselves and compare our thoughts and behaviour with his standards. Very often I find it not only painful, but also helpful to see ourselves through the eyes of other people who are not trying to suck up to us. Kids are great for pointing out our weaknesses. And if they're too young to say where we fail they usually show us by mimicking us, and their reactions to circumstances show us very clearly where we fail.

This message is not negative, it's extremely positive. If we can see where we go wrong, we can repent, and God can change us.

God specifically chose the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, and the nothing people, just so that he could show the world how mighty and wonderful he is.

Be your real self – God can use worms.

Chapter 12

Permanent Freedom from Depression

We're living in a very strange world at present and I can't believe how many young people have employed therapists to try to alleviate their anxieties and depression. It seems to be a modern epidemic. People are stressed out wondering if there's any purpose to their lives, indeed, why on earth they were even born.

In today's world secular education is all about getting qualifications so we can have a good job with a fat salary, be able to promote ourselves, and look good on social media. We're taught to focus on number one, ourselves, which means we don't need to be inconvenienced by such things as unwanted

pregnancies for instance. We have a right to do what we want with our own bodies, and the government will pay for us to indulge our whims to please ourselves as individuals.

Being Pregnant Changed Me

If we always focus on ourselves we will be the most depressed, miserable people imaginable. I was convinced I didn't want the responsibility of children, that is until I became pregnant myself and couldn't believe how many God given instincts just kicked in naturally. Without thinking I was careful about so many things such as what I ate and drank, and made sure I held on to bannisters when going up or down stairs, because the life growing within me had taken priority over me.

When the child was actually born I set my own needs to one side in consideration for my helpless babe, and was up night after night breast-feeding, winding, mopping up sick, and comforting through illnesses. And I did it willingly. My responsibility was not a burden, I was glad to be able to give myself for my precious child whom I unselfishly loved.

Taking our eyes off ourselves and caring for others can transform our lives. Many totally self-centred and depressed young people have found fulfilment

and joy after allowing themselves to go through with an unwanted pregnancy to become parents. There's a glowing sense of worth when giving out food to the homeless, visiting the sick or imprisoned, or helping the needy. I've even seen transformation when people have found a pet to take care of. Yes, considering others can change our lives.

Jesus' Last Message

Jesus knew the value of living for others. He came initially to do his father's will and be a sacrifice for the whole world, but he got close up and personal, and ended up loving deeply some of the individuals he came to save. When eating his last meal in the upper room with his disciples he told them that just as his father had loved him, that was the way he loved them, and instructed them to continue in that special love. Those who truly have a relationship with Jesus know this love he's talking about and that's why Paul wrote this in his letter to the Philippians:

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done

through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Philippians 2:1-4

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.

Hebrews 10:24

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

Hebrews 13:1-3

I'd like to tell you a little story my eldest son Nathan wrote some years back when he was a young boy. It went like this:

"Once upon a time, there was a seed which hatched in the earth.

Pushing through the soil it discovered the sun for the first time, and realising it was the source of his life, he devoted his life to reaching it.

As time passed he grew into a healthy young tree, and year after year, through winter, spring, summer, and autumn he strove and struggled to reach the light, stretching his branches as far as they could go, utilising the nutrients in the earth to aid his intent.

One year at the pinnacle of his growth he noticed that his progress had floundered, and his energy had exhausted. Then looking around he saw how he and the other trees, every one of them, had tried to reach the sun but none had managed. It was way out of their reach and absolutely impossible. He then realised all his efforts had been futile and he was in a state of limbo. He was neither close to the earth where he'd come from, nor could he ever hope to reach what he'd been aiming for all his life.

That autumn, the tree became depressed. As his leaves gradually withered and fell he realised the foolishness of his motives. There he was in mid-air. Cold, naked, and vulnerable to the elements.

After the harshest of winters spring started to take shape, and new life grew around him. He noticed the birds mating and the bears waking up from their hibernation. He observed the humans come out of their

houses to sit outside, comfortable with the cool temperature. He saw that even his own leaves were again starting to bud.

As time passed and summer came again, he looked around once more at the world around him. The birds had built nests within his branches, and the eggs they had laid had hatched into young chicks. The leaves he grew offered protection from predators and his seeds were food to them. He looked around at other trees which bore fruit, and saw the humans pick and eat them, giving them sustenance and health. Even the gasses which he emitted were being breathed in by all around him, and in turn, the gasses they emitted allowed him to breathe.

He then realised that his efforts were not in vain. He simply wasn't focusing on what mattered. When thinking about himself and his own achievements he fell short. But because he had bettered himself, because he had grown strong and tall, because he had used the life the sun gave him, he realised he was beneficial to those around him. All life was profited by his efforts, and while he never reached the light, he had fulfilled what the light had called him to do, which was to be of use to others, giving them the life which

was given to him."

Paul could have easily questioned his worth after being arrested and imprisoned. What value did he have now that he was stuck in a prison cell? Many of us have had our freedom stripped away and feel useless, but it didn't stop Paul. He had a mandate to preach the gospel so adverse circumstances weren't going to stop him. When he realised he couldn't travel he asked for parchments and began to write letters of encouragement and instruction to the churches he'd visited. He may only have targeted just a few brethren, and could even have been tempted to think, "What's the point?"

Paul is Still Preaching to Us

In his day and age the written words spread, and in our day shared posts also can become viral. The very fact that Paul not only had his freedom taken away, but was confined to a prison cell, has effected countless lives for 2,000 years, including mine.

May we all realise our God given potential so that we can live unselfishly and be a blessing to everyone we've encounter on our journey through this life. Wouldn't it be wonderful if when we faced Jesus Christ we'd hear his words, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

Chapter 13

Gentleness

Have you ever watched nature programmes and seen the way carnivorous animals hunt for their food, kill it, then eat it? I have a cat at the moment who regularly brings in mice, birds of all sizes, and even squirrels. If these creatures are full of life when he brings them in I usually manage to rescue and release them, but if they're already dead I've actually watched him devour them, and heard the sound of him cracking their tiny rib cages breaking them up into small enough pieces to swallow. Can you imagine what a terrifying experience it must have been for those early Christians who were thrown into the arena to be mauled and eaten by lions?

And yet even these ferocious creatures have a gentle side to them.

In Galatians we have a list of the fruit of the

spirit, and one of them is gentleness. There are other words which mean the same as gentle such as: amiable, compassionate, considerate, pleasant, tame.

Friends at Last

I'd had a male cat for some years who acted as though he were king of the castle, so when a young twelve week old kitten was introduced into the household he snapped and snarled and would have nothing to do with it no matter how friendly the kitten tried to be. But then one day the little kitten lost it's footing between two beams just outside my back door and there was a twenty feet drop beneath. The poor thing started crying and mewling in distress as it clung on to the beam for dear life, and quick as a flash my alpha male cat sprang to the rescue grabbed the kitten by the scruff of the neck and carried it back into the house for safety.

The two animals were inseparable after that incident. They ate together, played together, and my big cat purred in contentment as the kitten snuggled into his fur to sleep together.

You know, we serve an awesome, powerful, almighty God, who is a fierce judge. As early on as Genesis 6 in the bible we read this:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for I regret that I have made them.

Genesis 6:5-7

God can be so fierce. He was so angered by the wickedness and depravity of man that he sent a flood which covered the whole world and destroyed every air breathing, living thing, except those who were inside the ark Noah had built. But then when God looked at the devastation of his actions he made a covenant with every living creature, not just with Noah, saying that he'd never flood the whole earth ever again. And as a reminder of this covenant he put a rainbow in the sky telling them that whenever **He** saw the rainbow (**God**) he would remember his promise – no matter how angry he was, no matter how much his patience was tried by the way people and animals behaved, no matter how much wickedness and how many atrocities he witnessed on a daily basis, he would never destroy

the whole earth ever again until the final judgement day when everybody would stand before him. The rainbow is actually a reminder to God not us, but it's for our benefit and shows his consideration, his compassion, his goodness towards his creation.

70 Years is our Span

God also showed his goodness by lowering the life-span of man. The first people to live on the earth lived for hundreds of years, the first man Adam was 930 when he died, and Methuselah, the longest living man ever, was 969. Even Noah was aged 950 when he died. But in consideration for the sinful nature of mankind God in his goodness reduced our life-span to 120 years, and later on as recorded in Psalm 90:10 it was reduced still further to 70 years because God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Even many years after God commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and all the males in his camp as a covenant between himself and them, he gave a ruling through Moses that male boys must be circumcised when they were eight days old. This was a tremendous consideration because it has been evidenced that it is on the fifth through the seventh days of the newborn male's life that vitamin K is

present in adequate quantities for blood clotting. But on the eighth day, the amount of prothrombin present (that's a protein produced by your liver and is one of many factors in your blood that help it to clot appropriately) is above 100% of normal and this is the only day in the male's life in which this will normally be the case. Therefore, the eighth day is the perfect day to do the circumcision – when the Vitamin K and prothrombin levels are at their peak.

A Godly Reminder

And it's also the goodness and consideration of God that every time a circumcised boy relieves himself he looks at and is constantly reminded of the covenant between himself and his God which was made when he was just a child. God is so kind and good towards us. I don't think we realise just how much he bends over backwards to help us in our frail, sinful, weakness.

Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD
pities them that fear him. For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

Psalms 103:13-14

God gave commandments for his peculiar and special people, the Israelites, to follow and gave real incentives of great blessings and wealth if they

obeyed them. He also warned them what would happen if they disobeyed, and the consequences of disobedience were grave indeed. But he again saw how weighed down they were by this heavy burden. He knew how hard it was for them to live this righteous standard, they just couldn't do it, so he sent his son Jesus to be the ultimate sacrifice to get rid of sin entirely and removed completely the problem which kept not only the Israelites, but the whole of mankind separated from God. And when we accept this incredible sacrifice which Jesus made on our behalf Paul says this:

You are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a

show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increase with the increase of God. Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Colossians 2:10-22

So, if God has done that for us, how should we respond to God? Well, we should feel absolutely obligated to love and serve him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, just like he wanted in the first place. Yet Paul also, even though he was sent by God to instruct the disciples of Jesus Christ how to live lives pleasing to God, came with gentleness, not with force pleading with us.

I beseech you (*I beg you*) therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (*It's what we ought to do!*)

Romans 12:1

There was even an occasion when Paul wrote to Philemon, and to certain members in particular of the church in his house, asking them to be considerate to a former servant who had run away from him. He could have given Philemon a lecture on forgiveness but instead chose to plead with him as someone who had himself learned through experience about compassion.

For love's sake I rather beseech you (*I beg you*), being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds (*he became a believer whilst Paul was in prison*): which in time past was unprofitable to you, but now profitable to you and to me:

... That you should receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto you, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If

you count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he has wronged you, or owes you anything, put that on my account; I Paul have written it with my own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to you how you owe unto me even your own self besides.

Philemon 1:9-19

Let's learn from these wonderful examples how to treat one another.

You know Jesus gave us one commandment which if obeyed would prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that we truly are disciples of Jesus Christ – and that is to love one another as he loved us.

Let our goodness, our consideration, our compassion, be experienced by everyone so that we can even prove to ourselves our true relationship with Jesus.

Chapter 14

What do Real Christians Look Like?

This is an amazing fact – you can be inwardly transformed into the image and character of Christ by the renewing of your mind. If you change the way you think, you can become holy. Did you realise that you began your Christian life in the first place by changing your thinking? 'Repentance' simply means changing your mind. It's always our thinking that changes us. Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is". The devil also knows this, and that's why he always works on the mind, on our thinking. The mind is the centre of everything. Paul states in Romans 12 that we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice, and that we

should not be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind'.

Do you live in your own private world, full of bias, shaking off other people's opinions with the inward thought, "they don't understand"? If you do then you're a bigot.

Nothing Worse Than Ego

Often the people who work for somebody very famous or wealthy can be more proud and pompous than the person they're serving. I don't suppose there's anything worse for the ego than reflected glory. Human nature has a very funny side to it, hasn't it? It's amazing just how many of these characteristics are at work within each one of us.

The minister at my church had at one time been quite famous. A Granada Television film producer stumbled across him and, at Granada's own expense, made an hour-long documentary of the Barratt and Williams Divine Healing Ministry and their church activities, entitled simply "Sharon" (the name of the church). The film was shown to ten million people at peak viewing time on the television, won an Edinburgh Festival Award, and was shown in Italy at the World Film Festival. The story was then told in 37 national newspapers around the world. So it's not hard to feel one of the elite when God calls you

to work for a man like this – in fact, I found that I slipped quite naturally into it.

For some years Maurice and I travelled around with our minister, before his retirement from the church, to conduct various divine healing crusades. We worked very closely together, being of one mind and one spirit. All day long we'd be preparing for the evening service. We'd combine our prayer with fasting on liquids only and wouldn't eat until after the meeting had finished in the evening. We felt so much a part of the crusade that we put in as much effort as possible in the hope that God would work through us. So, it was no wonder that we felt very righteous – after all, we were doing our part and paying our dues.

We Go to Birkenhead

It was nearly 40 years ago but I remember one particular ten-day crusade we conducted in Birkenhead. The church was located in a working class area where most of the congregation were unemployed. In order to motivate the people of the church, Maurice and I invited them to come along to the church each afternoon to pray and fast for the meetings, and a few of those who were on the dole with time to kill responded. I remember looking around the room during our first prayer session

and thinking what a motley crew they were! I didn't know anything about their backgrounds, having had no communication with them before, and to my carnal, worldly way of thinking, they just looked like the failures and dregs of society who couldn't get work. To break the ice I asked them to share their testimonies as Maurice and I didn't know anything about them. One by one they testified, and as each one spoke God dealt very severely with my bigotry and superiority.

I Was in For a Surprise

The first man to share with us made reference to the blue lines on his face. I'd noticed them already, but had just imagined they were blue veins showing beneath the skin. But then he told his story of how a number of years previously he'd had a motor bike accident and was wrapped around a lamppost. He was rushed to hospital but was so severely damaged that they actually needed to wire his skull together, so what I was seeing and thinking were blue veins was actually this wire showing beneath his skin.

The accident had left him totally paralysed and confined to a wheel chair for a number of years. His brain had worked perfectly but his body just couldn't co-ordinate. Consequently people had treated him as though he was an imbecile. All the time his brain

had wanted to scream out and tell people how he felt as he hated their condescending attitudes and being treated like a child, but his body wouldn't accept the commands given from his brain. His mouth couldn't form the words, his hands couldn't hold what was offered him, and so he was locked in a world of incredible frustration.

Dramatic Healing

This man hadn't been a churchgoer, but somehow he'd heard that Jesus Christ could heal him. I can't remember if he was in his own home or a friend's home but, he cried out in his heart for God to do something in his life – and he was dramatically healed. He was a totally new man, who after this incredible transformation spent all his days whilst on the dole distributing handbills and giving his testimony to as many people as he could meet in a day. He was 100% committed to God.

I turned to another man in our small gathering and asked him to tell his story and was equally amazed by what he told me. Apparently he'd been a chronic alcoholic, and his slavery to drink had not only ruined his marriage but also his whole life. He lived in a high-rise block of flats and was in constant fear of being broken into. Consequently all his windows and doors were locked, bolted, and even

chained!

Personal Encounter with Jesus

He was watching the television one evening during a bout of drinking and went into the kitchen to get something. When he came back into his lounge he saw somebody seated on the settee. In panic he ran to the door to see whether he'd left it open but found it was still locked, bolted, and chained. He was baffled, and when he asked the intruder what he was doing there, he started to tell him all about his life, and his inward feelings, telling him things he'd never shared with anybody. When asked who he was, the stranger replied that he was Jesus. The man sharing his testimony told of his complete astonishment, because up until then he'd been a confirmed atheist and had never given God a second thought. But what he experienced then changed his life completely, and from that day forward he'd never taken a sip of alcohol and had given his whole life to God.

I don't know how you'd have felt listening to testimonies like these, but I felt embarrassed. I'd come into this working class church as a pompous, proud, arrogant Christian who had this 'ministry from God'. From the age of nine I'd attended a Pentecostal church where God was moving in a

dynamic way, and had been taught and indoctrinated with the scriptures, but what I was being faced with here were people who'd met God personally, and instead of hearing second hand from a preacher, they'd had a real encounter with God, which was something I'd never experienced. The testimonies of these men really humbled me and I realised that my 'holiness' was all self-righteousness. Up until that point I'd always thought of myself as being 'special', but now I realised I'd just had a good spiritual education.

I Felt Important

A few years after this Maurice and I were invited to speak and sing during the first part of a Full Gospel Business Men's dinner, the main speaker being a man named Joe (Paddy) Whelan. It's not hard to feel important when you're invited to speak at a 'business dinner' but when we'd finished our part, and Joe got up to give his testimony, God reminded me yet again of the lesson He'd taught me back in Birkenhead. Joe told of his life of crime and how, after years of being in and out of prison for his many criminal acts, he was placed in solitary confinement because he'd taken a chisel to a prison inmate whom he'd cut up so badly he was totally unrecognizable. Solitary confinement was meant to be a very severe

punishment, so during this time Joe didn't have any visitors, priests, or ministers, and his meals were passed to him through a window in his cell. I don't know how long he'd been in the punishment block, but he said that one day he saw a tremendous light and Jesus Christ Himself not only visited him, but dramatically changed his life.

That's My Jesus

I don't remember much of Joe's testimony, as it was quite a while ago when I heard it, but there was one phrase he kept saying which seemed to hurt me every time he said it, and that was, "That's my Jesus. That's my Jesus". He kept speaking about Jesus, not as though he'd read about Him, but as though he'd personally met Him. He was his Jesus. His life dramatically changed from black to white, his foul mouth was cleansed, his attitude changed, and the following day after this tremendous experience he requested a Bible. The prison wardens could see the transformation and knew that this was no 'con job'. It was for real. Paddy Whelen had met Jesus.

Some time later I was again at a Prison Fellowship Rally where I was asked to sing, and once more was reminded of the lesson God had taught me in Birkenhead because the main speaker was a man named Jimmy Rice who having no knowledge of

God, was brought up in villainy, and found himself in prison. When Jesus Christ Himself filled his cell with light one day and changed his life in a dramatic way, he found that his mouth was coming out with things that his mind hadn't even thought of. He rushed up to a prison warden and told him that he wanted to become a Christian, and that he'd also need a Bible. Whilst he was having this conversation with the prison warden, other inmates standing around with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths were absolutely bemused at what Jimmy was saying. But he was so ignorant about religion and Jesus Christ that he didn't even feel embarrassed to be talking about it! Jimmy's life was turned upside down because he had been visited by Jesus Christ Himself and given a fresh start.

I don't know what God feels about the majority of Christians who go to church these days, but from my personal point of view I can honestly say I find nothing more stimulating, inspiring, and motivating than hearing the testimonies of people who have had personal encounters with God when they've had no previous religious instruction. I find their lifestyles challenging because they change dramatically from what they were to something totally different. And they're usually not content to sit in a pew week after week soaking up sermons and reading their daily portions of scriptures. Instead they

avidly read the Bible as though it's a novel, and take everything they read at face value – and then put it into practice! When they've not been indoctrinated with religion they seem to have something fresh and real from God which makes them natural soul-winners because they're not putting on a pompous show or trying to 'do what Christians do', they're just natural and simply allow the changes that God has brought in their lives to shine through them.

They Sit Them in the Pews

Joe Whelan once told me that when he got out of prison and went to church for the first time he was shocked by the lack of enthusiasm. He came to the conclusion that churches don't bury their dead members, they sit them on the front row! And he said that years ago! It was bad enough that physical church services and conferences were replaced with virtual meetings on Zoom, but I wonder what he'd have said during lockdown with all the masks, and social distancing with elbow taps instead of real hugs, no communal singing, or coffee and snacks over fellowship afterwards, and to top it all having to pre-book a seat to even attend the service in the first place! Wow things certainly changed, but they've only exposed the truth of what Paul says.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof:
2 Timothy 3:1-5

Then Paul gives us an instruction:

... From such turn away.

Yes, Paul said they have a form of godliness, but their very actions deny the power of it because they don't live what they preach, and he tells us plainly we should turn away from them. If you can't see it for yourself then I'll spell it out for you ... We're in the last days and perilous times have come!

I honestly think it's time to get real, develop our personal relationship with God and those who are courageously like-minded, and come away from all sham.

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