

Experiences  
from *Life*

*Joanna Barratt*

Experiences from

*Life*

## OTHER BOOKS FROM BARRATT MINISTRIES MEDIA

### **Will The Real Christians Please Stand Up?**

Radical Christianity Series Volume 1

by Maurice Barratt

*The introductory volume of an in-depth practical study of the Sermon on the Mount. Food for disciples!*

### **Salt And Light: the character of a disciple**

Radical Christianity Series Volume 2

by Maurice Barratt

*A study of the beatitudes which reveal the radical character of Christ, the true “salt and light” that Christians must become.*

### **Playing With Fire: the use and abuse of music**

by Alex Robertson

*An enlightening, stimulating and provocative book, written by a professional musician, about a much debated subject in the Church today. Essential reading for church musicians.*

### **Manifesto for a Revolution: the kingdom of God on earth**

by Alex Robertson

*A study based around the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13, bringing significant new insights to what is happening in the church worldwide today. Simple, scriptural and radical.*

### **Play The Man: What women look for in men**

by Joanna Barratt

*Joanna shares honestly from her experience both as a single and a married women the godly characteristics every woman seeks in a husband.*

Experiences from  
*Life*

by Joanna Barratt



BARRATT MINISTRIES PUBLICATIONS  
Manchester M14 5QH, England

**EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

by **Joanna Barratt**

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the  
British Library

Paperback ISBN: 1 904592 13 9

Published & printed 2004 by **Barratt Ministries Publications**  
114 Daisy Bank Road, Victoria Park, Manchester M14 5QH, UK.  
E-mail: [info@barrattministries.org.uk](mailto:info@barrattministries.org.uk)  
Web: [www.barrattministries.org.uk](http://www.barrattministries.org.uk)

# Contents

- Preface1. My Call To Discipleship
2. Am I Of Any Value To God?
3. Living By Faith...
4. Giving God Rights
5. Ouch! Truth Often Hurts
6. Me – A Bigot?
7. People Can Change!
8. Learning To Swim
9. God's Grace Is Sufficient.
10. God Can't Be Everything To Us Until He's All We've Got
11. Putting Down The Boxing Gloves
12. "My Meat Is To Do Your Will, O God"
13. Freedom Through Failure
14. Bad Company Corrupts Good Morals
15. Acquiring A Taste For Humble Pie
16. "The Servant Is Not Greater Than His Lord"
17. God Sees All

# Preface


In issue 5 of Barratt Ministries *Challenge* newsletter, back in 1994, I began a teaching series on the Sermon on the Mount which continued up until Issue 61 in 2003. With each issue I asked Joanna to come up with a subject from her own experience which would complement the study I was giving.

Each time, Joanna was able to draw on an experience from her distant or recent past, and her “Experiences From Life” articles always brought my bible teaching into a clear and strongly practical focus. This book brings together the first selection of these articles, and at the beginning of each chapter is a brief summary of the Sermon on the Mount article which preceded it in *Challenge*.

Over the years so many people have told Joanna how they have been blessed and challenged by these articles. Her openness and willingness to share her weaknesses, failures and trials as well as her successes has been a great encouragement to many. For others it has been so helpful to have

something practical to relate to the bible teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. I believe that this book will bring that blessing – and that challenge – to many more.

**Maurice Barratt**  
Manchester, 2004



From "Pierce My Ear: The Call To Discipleship"  
Challenge Issue 5

Perhaps the greatest gift that God has given to mankind is free will. Have you ever thought what it would be like to be a robot? Being programmed would mean not having to think or make decisions for ourselves. But we are different. Every day we have to make thousands of decisions. We can't escape it. Even if we make up our mind to make no decisions, that's a decision in itself!

So it's very important what decisions we make. Our life hangs on it. There is no such thing as a small decision. One little decision can affect the whole course of our life.

What is the most important decision we can ever make in our life? Is it the decision to follow Christ? You would think so. But I believe that there's a much more important decision that we have to make after we become Christians! How can I say that? Can anything be more important than the decision to follow Jesus? Well, what about discipleship?

Jesus has too many followers - and not enough disciples. There's a big difference. Following Jesus is easy. But being a disciple is very costly. It's a big decision. People think that when we follow Jesus we get our ticket to heaven, and that's it, we're safe. No we are not! Because Jesus isn't looking for followers but for disciples.

# 1

## *My Call to Discipleship*

I'd seen it happen so many times before. As I was growing up I'd had really good friends who were dedicated Christians and had been called by God to serve Him in a ministerial capacity, and they had faithfully done so – until they found a husband, and children had come along. From that point onwards they felt that their ministry had changed, and now God wanted them to be submissive wives and godly mothers.

It had always jarred with me, because I couldn't see how this could be a ministry from God – I could only see it as fulfilling duty, otherwise millions of other non-Christian people in the world had also been given this ministry and were doing their job well! So I vowed that this would never happen to me.

When I became pregnant with my first child, Maurice and I continued to take ministerial engagements, but allowed a gap of 3 months when I

would be having our baby. Nathan was 6 weeks old when we first took him with us on our ministry tour of England. At 10 weeks old we took him to America for 4 weeks, came back for 10 days and then took him off again to Holland for another 5 weeks of intensive ministry.

## The trials of motherhood

Before becoming pregnant I had never had any interest whatsoever in children, so consequently I was not prepared for the vast changes that motherhood was to bring about in my life. From the time of his birth Nathan had been subjected to different countries, homes, beds, people – and the only constant thing in his short life was the breast milk that he received from me.

Towards the end of our ministry in Holland Nathan seemed to go through a time of acute insecurity and during the night he would wake every single hour for the comfort of being breast fed. At times he would sleep for only 20 minutes before needing to be fed again. It seemed as though he constantly needed the comfort that only I could give him.

This, of course, drained me terribly, as for days the baby kept me awake day and night, and the ministry became an exhausting ordeal. Sometimes we had to travel for 2 hours before arriving at a meeting, and then after the service had finished, another 2 hours drive before arriving home to get wearily into bed. My concentration and patience

went, I was on the verge of tears all the time – I was heading for a breakdown.

## A big decision

Maurice and I had worked together in the ministry for 25 years and we prided ourselves on always keeping our engagements no matter what obstacles were put in our path. But during this period of ministry in Holland, I let him down twice and he had to preach on his own while I stayed at home. I felt just too weak to carry on.

I felt so low that I confided in the wife of the pastor who headed up the Dutch organisation. She listened with concern to what I shared with her and told me that she had been in this very same position herself. She had made important changes in her own life in order to give time to her children and free her husband. She counselled me to do the same. I felt Maurice would not take kindly to this!

I knew I had to do something about my situation, and so I made the decision to give up my part in the ministry for about a year, in the hope that Nathan could get into some sort of routine. Since the theft of our musical instruments when I was 6 months pregnant, Maurice had developed tremendously in his preaching, so I did my best to encourage him to continue taking bookings without me for this period. As I had anticipated, Maurice was not happy with my suggestion.

For the next couple of months after returning

to England, we had planned to fulfil some local engagements and take a holiday before embarking on another tour of Scotland. I tried to persuade Maurice to get in touch with the ministers to let them know that I wouldn't be going with him, just to warn them of what was happening. But Maurice wouldn't discuss it with me and kept telling me to wait until nearer the time. I felt sure in my mind that God had spoken to me so I just waited for the situation to sink into his head.

## The call

On the Sunday of our holiday, we visited a local church and I asked God to speak to Maurice to let him know what He had told me. But throughout the sermon, instead of the minister speaking to Maurice, he was speaking directly to me! He was talking about Peter and his failures, and in particular his denial of Jesus Christ. When Jesus rose from the dead He didn't find Peter with the other disciples, He found him back at work, fishing, doing his old job. And it was during this time of failure that Jesus called him again to be His disciple and fulfil His will.

The minister stressed that the circumstances were not important, what was important was **the call**. This particular phrase hit me hard, and I had to examine myself. I knew I'd been called by God; all my life I had known a sense of destiny, I had known that God wanted me in the ministry. Then God brought the scripture to my mind that unless a

man was willing to forsake his father, mother, sister, brother, children, lands, houses, everything for His name's sake, then he was not worthy of the Kingdom of God. I was convicted, terribly convicted. In tears I made the promise to God that even though I knew it was going to be very costly I would take up my cross and follow Him. At the end of the meeting I told Maurice that I would be going with him to Scotland and that I would be taking up my position by his side in the ministry even though I had Nathan in tow. The very moment that I gave up the control of my life God stepped in and handled the circumstances.

The blessings followed

That week after I returned from holiday I received a telephone call from a Dutch minister who asked if I would come over to Holland to sing at their Pentecost meeting which was scheduled to be held at the Congress Hall in Den Haag. This meeting was to be filmed and shown on Dutch Cable Television. After looking at our diaries, Maurice and I realised that this was the only weekend free of ministry that we'd had for quite a long time. As Maurice had already arranged to be away at a recording studio in Scotland during this period, he told me to go ahead and accept the invitation.

I telephoned the minister and he made all the arrangements and said the airline tickets for myself and Nathan would be waiting at Manchester Airport. I'm at a loss to describe how I felt at that particular

moment, but I knew that this was the Lord endorsing my decision to carry on in the ministry. At the end of the weekend, as I was preparing to come home to England, somebody came up to me with an envelope containing £125 and told me that this wasn't for the ministry, but for my own personal needs. In all the years that I had been ministering for the Lord, nobody had ever given me a sizeable gift like that before. I came back to England really blessed and encouraged by the Lord.


A couple of days later I was having a chat with Paula, Maurice's younger daughter to a previous marriage. She had recently come to live at Barratt Ministries and had noticed that I needed help where the baby was concerned, so she offered her services saying that she would come to Scotland with me and baby-sit every evening while I went out with Maurice to the meetings. As we generally towed a 5-berth caravan with us when we were touring in the UK, this meant that Nathan (who was still only 8 months old) would be sleeping in the same bed every night, looked after by his big sister for the whole month, and, as he'd already become very fond of Paula, I knew that this was an answer to my prayer.

Eighteen months later I was back in Holland again, in a 3-bed roomed apartment which had been provided by the Dutch organisation we helped. Maria, Maurice's elder daughter, was there with us too. When Maurice and I went out on ministry, Maria faithfully came and looked after her little brother

(who adored his big sister!) which meant that Nathan could sleep in his own bed each night and keep some sort of routine in his life, even though Maurice and I were here, there and everywhere for the Lord.

### God's responsibility

I can't thank God enough for the way He provided for all my needs. My biggest fear was leaving Nathan with other people whilst I was away so much. But God had already foreseen my decision to take up my cross and prepared his 2 older sisters, who didn't do this task out of duty, but because they really did love and enjoy their little brother. Being a mother is a tremendous responsibility, but being a Father who has to look after both mother and child (and that's what God is to me and Nathan) must be a far greater responsibility, something He seems to have willingly accepted!



From "Deny Yourself:  
The Cost of Discipleship Part 1"  
Challenge Issue 6

"Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). What does 'deny yourself' mean? Well, it doesn't mean 'stop sinning'. We shouldn't be doing that anyway! It's not to do with the moral battles we have in our conscience. We all have an old nature. We can only deny ourselves things that we want to do which are not sinful. I like what most people like - friends, family, comforts, possessions, pleasures, a nice home, a nice car, nice food ... Those aren't sinful. They're just natural things. But it's in those things that we are called to deny ourselves. Denying ourselves is to do with being different from the world, putting actions behind our words and swapping the values of one kingdom for another.

Jesus said: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If you want to know where your heart is, look at your own life and ask yourself some important questions: What do I spend my time on? What do I spend my money on? What do I think about when I go to sleep and wake up? What couldn't I live without ... my husband, or wife, or children? My house? Music? TV? Remember, there's nothing sinful about these things. It's whether we can deny them to ourselves and live without them, thus proving our allegiance to God.

## 2

# *Am I Of Any Value To God?*

I have never seen in any church anything to compare with what I witnessed with my own eyes 40 years ago in my own church. I was brought up in a miraculous ministry. The miracles were so impressive that Granada television, at their own expense, produced an hour long documentary of the events going on in the church and showed it on television at peak viewing time to millions of people. This documentary was later shown in many countries of the world and people from Greenland, Iceland and many outlandish places came to the church looking for God's healing power.

The highlight of our yearly calendar used to be a Divine Healing Crusade when we would invite everybody, Christian and non Christian alike, to attend. We were never disappointed, tremendous things always took place. But one year the minister

did something very unusual. He told us not to invite friends, church members or people who were sick because God had told him to hold a crusade particularly for the church members and that he should speak from the Sermon on the Mount.

I was 26 then, and had been attending the church since I was 9. During the course of all those years I'd learned much about God. I'd also become very involved in church activities when at the age of 15 I'd become the church organist, church secretary, and had been asked to join a musical gospel group as a singer. The church had answered so many of my needs and had helped me through many traumatic and lonely years after leaving home at the age of 16. Yes, God had been of tremendous 'value' to me, and I was glad that I was a Christian. But the Sermon on the Mount was different, I found that I wasn't being faced with Christianity but with discipleship, and I had to ask myself the question, "Am I of any 'value' to God?"

## A personal challenge

God began to challenge me about the practical things a Christian should do like praying, fasting, almsgiving. To be honest, I'd never heard a sermon on almsgiving so I didn't know what it really was. As far as fasting was concerned this was something I thought people did when someone was dying or in dire need. I didn't realise that these were things a disciple was expected to practice as a lifestyle. I

know for sure that this crusade for the church had been inspired by God because after 6 meetings a week for a whole month, the minister had only gone through the first 8 verses of Matthew 5, and the effect on the church was so devastating that he promised us he would continue to preach the Sermon on the Mount until he had finished ... it took 5 years!

Those who had ears to hear in the church were turned upside down, and I was one of them. During this intensive teaching, God challenged me to fast for a whole week on water. It was a frightening prospect for me because I'd never gone one whole day, let alone a week. I knew in my heart that if I stayed at home I would find it too easy to give in to temptation, so I hired a holiday cottage where there was no food to tempt me.

## Equipped

I arrived at the cottage equipped with bible, hymnal and a book that contained a diary of the prophecies, visions and words of encouragement God had given me over the years. The house seemed so cold and lonely. I looked around to see what facilities there were. I tried the television and found that it didn't work, there was no radio or cassette player, and the telephone had a lock on which meant I could only receive calls! I panicked – God had challenged me to spend a week with Him, but I didn't know Him. He was a stranger to me. I must admit I expected some tremendous spiritual experiences during this

week, but all I discovered was how self-centred, carnal and unspiritual I was. I think this was one of the hardest weeks God has ever asked me to live through, and I have to confess I couldn't wait for the 7th day to be completed.

## Giving God rights

In one respect I think it's a relatively easy thing to give God your life because you can pass over all your burdens and problems and know He'll take care of them. But it's a very different matter if God decides to accept your gift and use your life. This experience of fasting showed me that, until now, whatever I had given to God I had given of my free will ... things I had wanted to give Him ... but now God had decided to put demands on me and ask for things that I would never have dreamed of giving to Him, and I found this to be very disconcerting and costly. And because I didn't refuse to give God this week, I found that He began to work in my life and do things that I never expected.

Throughout my school days I was chosen to sing solos in concerts, festivals, etc. It was a natural progression for me to sing and play the organ in the church because that's where my talent lay - in music. By the time I was 26 I had fulfilled a lot of my ambitions, making records and cassettes, and was even being paid an astronomical amount as a session singer with a company who produced radio and television jingles. Life for me as a singer couldn't

have been better, I was given a regular platform and recognition both inside and outside the church. But after this fast, God spoke and said He wanted me to give up all my activities in the church. At first I doubted that God could say something like this, but I knew His voice and He proved to me (in quite a drastic way) that I had heard correctly. I obeyed what He was asking, despite much protest from people.

“You need to be humbled!”

One day a member of the church asked me why I'd stepped down from the platform and I told her that God had told me to do so. She then told me something that surprised me greatly. Apparently for a few weeks she had been fasting and praying for me because she was concerned, and God had told her I'd been in the limelight far too long and I needed to be humbled!! Coming from another person I might have been very offended, but she'd just told me that she'd fasted and prayed for me and I accepted gratefully what she told me. I had never felt so close to God. I knew that at this specific period in my life I was doing His will and not fulfilling my own ambitions and desires, and yet for all that, within a matter of a few weeks I was out of the church followed by terrible wicked rumours.

I've noticed people can only judge appearances. Whilst I was on view working in the church, they thought I was spiritual, but once I was off the

platform and obeying God it seemed as though I lost all the protection the platform afforded me, and the devil made a vicious attack and caused people to question why I'd stepped down ... and they came to natural conclusions. Thinking that I'd fallen into sin and had had to be disciplined, all their secret jealousy and envy really came to the fore and I found out what they really thought of me.


The brutality and viciousness of my 'brothers and sisters' was just too much and I ended up leaving the church. I almost lost my salvation. But it was during this period of desolation that God really began to build my life up from scratch as He laid new foundations in my heart. One of the most painful things I know is to face up to the truth. He showed me how, for all these years, I had been serving the church instead of serving Him.

### A new beginning

A year after this experience I started my Christianity again, but this time without the props of being on church platforms and singing in public. When I read my bible now it was because I wanted to know God. When I prayed now it was because I wanted to commune with God, and it wasn't for what I could pass on to others in the church because I was in a position of authority. As far as I was concerned I thought my singing career in the church was finished completely, and I said: "*God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord*".

Yet God was very merciful to me and 3 years later

He put me back in the ministry, but this time I'd had a 'heart transplant' and my attitude towards my service for God was totally different and has never gone backwards to what it was before. I thank God for taking hold of this life of mine and making me do what I didn't want to do, because I know that His way is best. *"The Lord knows the way that I take, and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold"* (Job 23:10).



From "Take up Your Cross:  
The Cost of Discipleship Part 2"  
Challenge Issue 7

In order to follow Jesus we have to first learn where He is going ... to the Cross! Jesus' mission in life was to show God's character to the world and then die on a cross that men and women could be saved from coming under God's judgement. When Jesus first confided this to His disciples, they were shocked. They had expected Him to set up His kingdom there and then. Jesus then said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26). He was saying, "OK, you've committed yourself to becoming a disciple in word, now let's see some action ... 'put your money where your mouth is!' You say you've counted the cost, let's see how far you want to go."

# 3

## *Living By Faith*

“Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on ... behold the fowls of the air ... they don’t work but God takes care of them...” (Matthew 6:25-26). This “life of faith” always sounded like the answer to every Christian’s dream – no need to work for a living because God will provide for all our needs – but it was the most humbling experience I ever remember going through, and I fought hard against it!

It’s laughable to think that what to most people would have been an enviable situation caused me tremendous embarrassment. I was 25, I had my own flat, my own car, and I had landed a very exciting job in an advertising agency which gave me opportunities to personally be involved in modelling, beauty contests, fashion shows, etc. Maurice and I had just gone into partnership and were setting up a small recording business which was specifically aimed at

Christian artists, with the purpose of helping them to make albums in a Christian environment at a cost that they could afford. Although we looked forward to the day when we could give up our jobs and be solely supported by the business, at that time any profit that came in was paying off bank loans and going towards better equipment for the studio.

“Step out in faith”

I remember one morning really struggling in prayer. I'd been experiencing this for a few days. The heavens seemed like brass, even though I was trying my best to lead a more disciplined and dedicated life, spending 2 hours each morning before work in prayer and Bible reading. But this particular morning the struggle got to me and I felt I couldn't leave things as they were. I told God that I wouldn't budge from my room until He spoke to me. I remember fighting and speaking out loud in tongues, and it was during this time that God gave me a specific vision telling me to “step out in faith”. I knew that God was asking me to leave work because He'd been leading up to it for some weeks now – and this was one particular thing that I didn't want to do.

I loved my work, I loved my independence, I loved my freedom. But God was telling me to give all this up and be available for Him. I didn't like it, but I know when God speaks and so that very morning I went into work and handed in my notice. It wasn't a rash decision, it was an act of obedience.

Maurice and I had talked the situation over and we'd decided that I would be given a nominal sum each week from Sharing Records (the name of our company) which would pay for my rent and food. We decided that I had to get rid of my car because this would be too much of a drain on resources.

### The blessings of obedience

Things went well for a few months. As I was the minister's secretary there was plenty of church work for me to do. Maurice and I also ran coffee mornings in the church, where we continuously showed videos of the previous Sunday's services, and held music concerts. Strangers often wandered in through the doors, had a coffee, and watched a service, giving us a great opportunity to witness and invite them to church meetings.

I also began to blitz Manchester with tracts, taking a van load of workers from the church twice a week to different areas, where we would spend 2 hours in the morning giving out tracts. We would then go to the home of one of the church members for soup and rolls, followed by prayer, and then we would continue to give out tracts for a further 2 hours during the afternoon. This proved to be a tremendous time of blessing and I remember that many of our church members who came out with me were filled with the Holy Spirit and received the gifts of prophecy and vision. My instruction from the Lord to leave work and to live by faith was becoming

more and more a blessing to me – until something completely outside my control took place.

## The cost of faith

The house where I had my flat had belonged to 2 old bachelor brothers who had lived together all their lives. Their characters were totally different. The strong-minded older brother died and left the younger brother (who was in his 70s), a very lonely frightened man, alone in the house; and he was looking for a tenant to give him some sense of security. I took over the bottom floor of the house and he had his apartment upstairs, and, knowing his situation, I did my best to befriend him. I regularly made his Sunday dinner and would take him out in my car to the park some Saturdays. Everything seemed very pleasant, until his attitude towards me changed and I realised that he had completely misunderstood my actions and had become deeply emotionally involved with me.

To put it mildly, I was very frightened to live in the same house as this man. But a married couple, who were close friends and lived in a very large house, immediately said that I must move in with them. They were very good to me. At that particular time they had tenants in their house paying rent for the rooms they occupied, but I was given 2 rooms and told that I didn't need to pay any rent. They also said (as I didn't have any money) that I could eat with them as part of their family. Maurice suggested that

as I no longer had to pay rent or buy food, Sharing Records would not need to support me financially. So in one fell swoop my independence was totally cut off. There is a vast difference between having money and deciding not to spend it, and having no money and not being able to spend!

### An embarrassing life

I was in a position where I was dependent on this married couple for everything – and I didn't like it one bit. I knew that they were going through hard times financially and I just felt as though I was an added pressure and burden. I had been given 2 rooms because they knew I had a lot of furniture and was used to plenty of space around me, but I knew that those 2 rooms could have brought in a good rent each week. Their situation was so bad that some weeks I remember them taking pictures from the wall and selling them to raise the rent. Some weeks I would give them articles of mine that could bring in some money when sold.

At that time the wife was working one day a week in a second-hand store and she would often come home with articles of clothing for me, because she knew that I couldn't afford to buy clothes myself any longer. Although I appreciated her kindness and consideration, it embarrassed me tremendously, and every time I sat around the table to eat a meal with the family I felt like an intruder, and constantly felt uncomfortable. As soon as the dishes were cleared

away I would dash up to my rooms and would stay there for the remainder of the evening – but then this caused problems, because they thought that I didn't want to socialise with them!

A few months after I'd moved in with this family, Maurice's 2 sisters invited me share a holiday with them, saying that I didn't need to pay anything because they had taken care of everything. I was in an awful situation where I felt under obligation to everybody.


“You're ungrateful!”

I decided to have a word with the minister of the church and tell him how I felt, so the next time I went to the office I poured out my heart to him. I was really amazed at his reaction. Instead of being sympathetic and understanding, he told me that I was the most ungrateful person he'd ever come across! I was absolutely shocked at what he said but he continued and told me that God had called me to work for Him full-time and to live by faith, and God had proved the call by providing for me with this family who were prepared to take me on even though I was an added burden on their financial resources. If I hadn't accepted their hospitality and generosity then I would not have been able to work full-time for God, as I was single and couldn't support myself financially. He also reminded me that God could see everything that this married couple were doing, and that one day He would reward them personally for all the efforts they had put into obeying His voice, and

that if I was to refuse their kindness now I would be robbing them of a tremendous blessing later.

## Vulnerability

I tried hard to defend myself, telling him that it wasn't that I was ungrateful, I just felt as though I was a terrible burden on this family. But he ignored everything I said and told me that I was very proud and very independent, and that God had probably placed me in this situation just so that these characteristics could be dealt with. I have learned that "living by faith" is more than expecting God to supply your material needs – it's becoming completely vulnerable and dependent on God for everything ... and it hurts very much, until we've submitted – at which point it becomes the most carefree, exciting life anyone could hope for!



From "Follow Me:  
The Cost of Discipleship Part 3"  
Challenge Issue 8

Jesus said some strange and perplexing things to his disciples. "Take up your cross" – people have different ideas of what this means, and they nearly always think it is to do with circumstances. The lady with an unbelieving husband who ridicules her for her faith is convinced that he is her cross. The young man who works for a difficult boss who picks on him and is most unreasonable. Or the old lady who has been crippled with arthritis for 20 years and has never yet received the healing that she has begged God for.

But none of these things are anything to do with the cross we have to take up. The cross can never be to do with our circumstances.

Non-Christians have circumstances like these, they are common to mankind. If these things were crosses then millions of non-Christians take them up daily. So we can't say our problems and burdens are the cross. Our cross is something quite different.

Jesus said, "Take up your cross" which means it is a voluntary decision. We must start to change inside and do something positive outwardly. We have to voluntarily take up something God has placed before us which our flesh does not want. We cannot crucify ourselves, we can only take up our cross, place it across our back, and keep walking. God will do the crucifying when the time is right.

# 4

## *Giving God Rights*

I have been in situations where God has placed something before me which has been repulsive to my flesh. But I've come to realise that kicking and screaming against what God has put before me doesn't help. God does not pity the flesh – He destroys it!

It's happened so often that I have come to recognise there must be a principle involved here. My family became Christians when I was only 9 years old, but I'm afraid the lifestyle which we led caused me to grow up to be a very rebellious, stubborn, quick-witted and sarcastic teenager... not that I was aware then of my shortcomings; there always seemed to be some justifying reason why I didn't get along with people. After discharging myself from school at the age of 15 I talked my way into a clerical job which I thoroughly enjoyed. I loved going out to work every day, and the idea of a wage and bonus at the end of the week proved an added incentive.

I worked hard and within 2 months was promoted to a position of supervisor over 2 women older than myself. Promotion must have gone to my head, as after another 4 weeks had passed I was told to do something quite menial by one of my superiors which I adamantly refused to do. I felt it was beneath me, someone on a lesser level should do it! The next day when I arrived at work I was called into the bosses office, handed a wage packet and told I was free to leave immediately. I was devastated and wondered what had gone wrong. I really had enjoyed my work, but I'm afraid that when it came to female superiors telling me what to do I just couldn't handle it.

Bad attitude - bad witness!

My next few jobs were no different - they all ended up in the same way, I would start off great, but then I would end up being sacked for my rebellious attitude. What seemed to make matters worse was the fact that people always knew that I was a Christian. From my very first day at work people used to question me as to what I did in my spare time. I told them that I went to church, I was the organist, I sang in a church-based group, and this always used to open up conversation about God and the gospel. So to end up being dismissed from my employment reflected badly on my Christianity and witness, and I felt that not only was I bringing disgrace on myself but also on God. Many times I pleaded with God to change my character, but it

was no use. I always ended up losing my temper and doing something which I later regretted. My problem was intensified by the fact that I used to live in a flat and I needed a regular income each week to pay the rent and bills – and I knew that if something didn't happen soon to enable me to hold down a job then I would end up in real trouble.

It was at this point that I decided to join a bureau where people could take jobs on a temporary basis to cover for somebody in permanent employment who was ill or on holiday. It meant that I would stay at a firm no longer than 1 or maybe 2 weeks at a time before I was moved into some other temporary position. Some of the jobs were good, others were not so good, but this wasn't important because I didn't stay long enough to encounter any problems – except one particular time when I was sent to an insurance company and put in a typing pool filled with women, with a woman to supervise us. Our work quota was to type 60 letters a day which meant that we had to be swift, accurate typists. Often I had races with myself to see just how many letters I could complete, and sometimes I would end up with 100 letters under my belt at the end of the day!

My work capacity was recognised by the male bosses and I was regularly asked if I would become a permanent member of staff. I adamantly refused time and time again. The reason for this was because of the female supervisor who was over us – she didn't take to me one little bit and always looked

for opportunities to find fault with me. Because I was there as a temporary employee I used to ignore her snide remarks and think to myself “Well, I may not be here next week.” Other times I would think, “I don’t work for this firm, I work for the bureau,” and, “She has no real authority over me.” Because of my change in attitude, I managed to hold down this job for a miraculous 9 months until a permanent person was found to take my place. I left the firm on good friendly terms and was reassured that if ever I wanted a permanent job in the future they would accept me without question.

## Working for God

This ‘success’ made me think. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that if I had been permanently employed there I wouldn’t have lasted 9 months at all because there would have been a terrible confrontation between this woman supervisor and myself at some stage. From this point my attitude completely changed and I realised that I wasn’t even working for the bureau – I was working for God, and should treat every situation of employment in this manner whether I was permanent or temporary. A preacher friend of mine once said in one of his sermons, “If you can’t change your circumstances, change your attitude!” From then on I worked for many firms on a temporary basis and was able to witness for Jesus Christ without being disgracefully sacked, and every firm offered me permanent

employment, which I refused, until I had the opportunity to work for an advertising agency. This was totally different to any other employment which I had been in so far, it was so exciting and vibrant. I came into contact with many famous people and was given the opportunity to model and do all sorts of things which I'd never dreamed I could have become involved with. When I was asked to work for this firm on a permanent footing I jumped at the chance.

## Fulfilment and frustration

I never dreamed I could be so fulfilled. The people I worked with were not all in a mould, as was usual in the ordinary run-of-the-mill office, but because of the nature of this business they were all incredibly individual. The advertising agency was situated in an old detached house with 3 storeys and basements where bedrooms and lounges had been converted into offices, and yet the original structure of the place had been kept intact. To get his inspiration, one of the 'ideas men' used to sit in a bath full of cold water in the hope that he would come up with some weird and wonderful slogan for a new advertising campaign which would catch the eye and imagination of the public! The people here were so eccentric that it didn't matter what ideas they had, however bizarre or strange. Consequently my Christianity was just accepted in the same manner as everybody else's weird lifestyle – and it was never taken as something that could possibly challenge

them. I witnessed and prayed for a long time that God would use my testimony and lifestyle to speak to these people and bring them to Christ, but nothing happened.

## A new challenge

I'd been at this job for nearly 2 years when the minister of my church decided that he would hold a crusade for the church members on the theme of The Sermon on the Mount. As I was the organist and worked very closely with the minister, he shared with me beforehand what his intentions were and stressed that it was very important that we, as the leadership, ought to prepare ourselves for these meetings.

I had never fasted before, but I decided that I would fast all day at work then ride to the church on my bicycle and have something small and light before the service and save my main meal until I got home.

For a whole month I put the effort in, and as the crusade was meant to challenge the church I reaped the benefit of that challenge and my whole life was devastated. I found that I wasn't thinking of the Sermon on the Mount only during the meetings, but God invaded my thoughts all through the day, and in the course of a month I changed dramatically without even realising it. By the end of that month I had heard 24 sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, the pastor had preached it so thoroughly that he'd only got through the first 8 verses of Matthew chapter 5!

So I was left in no shadow of a doubt about what

God intended that the characteristics of a Christian should be. And I knew I didn't match up – hence the challenge! I suppose it was this realisation that caused all my soul-searching during the day. I knew I wasn't in the right place with God – but I didn't know what to do about it. I need not have worried. God had seen my efforts over the month and now He was doing things in my life that I could never have done on my own.

### A bewildering experience

I remember walking into the office of one of the directors' secretaries one day to ask her something, and we were just chatting in the normal way when suddenly she stopped in her tracks, blushed, put her hand over her mouth and apologised for her foul language saying, "I'm really sorry Joanna, I didn't mean to say that in front of you". When I asked her what she meant she said to me so sincerely, "Well you're holy and I really didn't mean to use language like that in front of you". I walked back to my office feeling very bewildered. I didn't know what had changed this girl's attitude. She was recognised as the most shocking, sexually explicit, crude and daring girl in the company (which was really saying something amongst all these eccentric people!) and yet she was apologising to me for her language!

A week later she and 3 of her close pals at work asked if they could come along to one of the meetings at the church, after which they told

everybody in the firm how much they had enjoyed it. A couple of weeks later one of the bosses came, then shortly afterwards 2 other girls came, one of whom was a Catholic, and the other one, who had been saved and filled with the Holy Ghost on her first visit, continued to go to the church on a regular basis. My life at work took on a new meaning as I began to hold prayer meetings and Bible studies during the lunch hours for those who were interested, until the time when God told me to leave work and go full-time for Him in the ministry.

### The principle of self-denial


I didn't realise when I made the decision to deny myself meals for that month, that it would have such an enormous effect on my life. At the time I was doing it because I felt responsible for the meetings, and I put effort in for the cause of the crusade, and yet God rewarded me personally. And this has happened so often in my life that I have come to recognise that it is a principle. Accepting this lifestyle, and practising self-denial for the right reasons, provides God an opportunity to touch areas in our lives that He's never been able to get near before.



Touring Scotland in the van and caravan with Maurice and Nathan (8 months). Paula's first trip as baby-sitter



Nathan, 1 year old, with his 2 half-sisters Maria (left) and Paula



From "Two Natures: Holiness Part 1"  
Challenge Issue 9

We are born sinners. No child is born innocent and pure. It is easy to prove. Do we need to teach children how to be naughty? Of course not! Almost the first word a child learns is "No!" Parents have to teach their child how to be good, not how to be naughty!

If the parents are sinful by nature, then they are not going to produce a holy child who is good by nature! They'll produce a child with the same nature as they have. Sinners produce sinners. So scripture and experience tell us the same thing - we are all sinners even though we are Christians. The old nature, completely corrupt and selfish, is still with us. And God still sees our sins. He isn't blind! He sees us exactly as we are, guilty - but this is the miracle of grace. He forgave us, He had mercy on us. I am a forgiven sinner. That is grace, and that is true freedom. There is only one condition: "If we confess". We have to admit that we are sinners. That is vital. For if we begin to say we are not sinners any more, we walk out of grace. We cut ourselves off from God's forgiveness.

# 5

## *Ouch! ... Truth Often Hurts*

It had been just a normal day. We'd opened the church up for yet another coffee morning, and seen a few of the regulars drift into the church for coffee and to review the last Sunday's service which we had videoed and shown at the church. We'd chatted to 1 or 2 people, but nothing special had happened.

I closed the doors of the church and Maurice and I settled down to our usual practice of praying for the people who had been in. We then opened Oswald J. Smith's book "Compassion For Lost Souls" which we had been reading each day in the hope that God would give us the compassion that we so badly needed for our district. Although it was a very good book, it rarely made any impression on me, probably because I was so self-centred that I couldn't identify with, or have compassion for, other people and their situations. But this day God spoke loud and clear.

In the chapter which we were reading, Smith was talking about a man who lived in Africa. The village

witch-doctor had just died and his position was now vacant. This particular man badly wanted to fulfil the role of witch doctor, so he went into the heart of the jungle and fasted for 7 whole days – at the end of which he was totally possessed by evil spirits and could do all sorts of magic, which now qualified him for the position that he so longed for.

We had just undergone some very detailed teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, so I was fully aware that fasting was supposed to be part of the lifestyle of a Christian ... knowing all about it is one thing, but putting it into practice is quite another!

### The sword of the Spirit

It was then that I felt the sword of the Spirit pierce my heart and it made me look at my life afresh. This African man had given 7 complete days of his life in total abstinence to be possessed of evil spirits and yet I had never even given God one day. OK, I'd given up a meal here and there, but I had never allowed myself to be put at God's disposal. I always did only what I could handle myself. And now God was challenging me to give Him a whole week to fast on water and pray so that He could possess me and use me. And because I knew without a shadow of a doubt that God was telling me to do this, I was really frightened.

I didn't tell Maurice what I had decided to do, but I began to put my plan of action into operation.

I knew that it was useless for me to stay at home, where the biscuit barrel and the bread bin would beckon so readily and where I would feel powerless to refuse. I had to get away completely alone, where I was deprived of all temptation, to enable me to fulfil the obligation which I now owed to God. Whilst reading through a “Redemption Tidings” magazine I came across an advertisement which offered holiday accommodation at a cottage in Matlock, Derbyshire, for the week of the Assemblies of God conference. Obviously the owners had wanted to go to the conference and yet didn’t want their home to be left vacant, so they were offering it for rental. I made contact with the owners and found out that they were the wardens of the Eventide Home for elderly Christians, which was on the same road as their cottage only 5 doors away, and that their church was just round the corner, where they were sure I’d be made very welcome.

## Shut in with God

On the day appointed I arrived in Matlock armed with my Bible, hymnal and the prophecy book which I’d kept ever since God had started to speak to me personally. I was shown round the cottage by the people who were standing in for the wardens of the Eventide Home. Although I didn’t have a television in my own home, I was very relieved to find that there was one here, because I knew that on the nights when I would be feeling very lonely I would be able

to turn it on and have company. But just before my guides left, they informed me that I wouldn't be able to use the television, as something had been removed from it due to the fact that the licence fee had not been paid! They also informed me that the church had closed down for the duration of the conference, as all the members had gone there.

As soon as I was alone I made a much more detailed inspection of the house to see what facilities there were for me – and found that there was no radio, no cassette player, and the telephone had a lock on which enabled calls to come in but none to go out – and nobody knew I was there except Maurice, who would be collecting me again in a week's time! And as the church had closed, no chance of fellowship!

## Vulnerable

I suddenly felt very frightened and vulnerable. I was totally alone. God had asked me to spend a week with him but I realised I didn't even know Him. I had served Him for years in the church and had met regularly with other Christians for spiritual activities, but this was different. I reckoned it would be best if I could work out a schedule for the week, so I decided to spend 2 hours in prayer and Bible reading in the morning, 2 hours in the afternoon and 2 hours in the evening. My spirit was very willing, but my flesh was incredibly weak – I hadn't taken into account the violent headaches that began to attack me. Being a very healthy and strong-minded person

normally, I was totally unprepared for the weakness that came over my body as soon as I stopped eating, and this weakness seemed to affect everything that I did. As the week progressed I found that reading the Bible became impossible; the words would all jumble together and become a blur; my vision couldn't take in and focus what I was looking at, my mind began to wander and I just couldn't concentrate for long periods to pray.

### An unexpected request

On the Wednesday evening the deputy warden at the Eventide Home called round to see me to ask if I would like to give a word to the old ladies the following morning. She knew that I had come away for this week to have a retreat and thought that maybe I could give some sort of testimony which would encourage the ladies. I was amazed, because an immediate response came out of my mouth before I could catch the words – and I accepted her invitation. For about 10 minutes after she had gone the Lord just cleared my mind and I was able to write down the outline for a 30 minute sermon which I could preach to the ladies the next day – but then my mind became a blur again and concentration was absolutely impossible!

That night was the worst night of the whole week in the house. I had decided to take a bath and had run the hot water. I sank down beneath the surface and felt the heat of the water surge through my body

bringing on with it a stomach cramp (which I had only ever read about in fasting books). It was a horrifying and fearful experience, during which I thought that I would die. I began to palpitate so much that I thought my heart would burst. Strength completely left me and I couldn't raise myself out of the water. I was really frightened and thought I would die in the bath. In my imagination I could see newspaper headlines ... "Stupid Christian drowns in bath after fasting!" It must have taken all of 10 minutes to gradually drag my body out of the water, and even longer to get down the stairs to boil a kettle of water for a warm drink and fill up a hot water bottle to place on my stomach, but God pulled me through.

### A miracle of grace

The next morning after only 4 hours sleep (yet again!) I wearily made my way down the road to the Home, wondering how on earth I was going to face these women with my mind so confused and blurred. I rang the bell – and as soon as I was admitted my head miraculously cleared and strength surged through my body, so much so that I was able to sing and play the piano for the ladies with gusto and preach my 30 minutes sermon about the dangers of old age, at the end of which the women were in tears asking God to help them with their own prayer lives! I felt alert and bright eyed as I chatted with the deputy warden after the meeting, and almost ran back to the cottage to get down to my own personal

prayer and Bible reading. I thought the Lord had taken me out of that first stage of fasting and cleared my mind completely so I could be spiritually alert and sharp.

But as soon as I put the key into the door and stepped inside, this miraculous strength just flowed from me and I was totally exhausted! I picked up my Bible and prayed and put all the effort in that I could muster, but it just seemed like a waste because I couldn't remember anything that I read or anything that I said. When God called me to give Him this week I truly and sincerely felt that I would have broken through into the spiritual realm and seen God in a fresh way, but as far as I was concerned it had been an utter failure. My physical weakness from lack of food was only proving to emphasise the stark reality of my true spiritual state with God – I was totally impoverished!

Pride creeps in

And yet, for all this feeling of inadequacy, the first meal that I partook of filled me with a great sense of satisfaction – after all, I had just completed, for the first time in my life, 7 whole days on water! The food strengthened my body like magic and I instantly felt strong both physically and spiritually. I remembered the reading that Maurice and I had just had concerning the man who wanted to be a witch-doctor, and my heart filled with aspirations for what God could now do through me after giving

Him a week of my life in the same manner. I could imagine myself healing the sick and casting out devils and doing all the things that He commanded His apostles to do, and I couldn't wait to get back to the church to see what God was going to do in my life! Looking back I'm amazed how quickly pride overtook my feeling of failure, but God was good and didn't allow me to stay in that situation for long.

### Open to attack

The week after the fast I was still riding high on my spiritual cloud, and left myself very vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. Maurice often told me of something his father had said concerning war tactics. He said that you were at your most vulnerable just after a victory. That is the very time the enemy usually plans an attack, and wins, because you are off your guard.

During my Christian walk I'd had problems in various areas of my life, and I had begged God to deliver me. In His mercy He had come to my rescue. But the very first week following the fast Satan tested me again with these things – and I fell for each one of them! I was absolutely bewildered – surely after the fast I should be more spiritual rather than more carnal! The tremendous guilt I felt drove me to prayer, and God spoke to me:

1. God reminded me that my fast was not a voluntary sacrifice, but the result of His specific instruction to me. He told me that if I had refused to do the fast, that would have been disobedience,

in which case I should have deserved punishment. The fact that I had been obedient didn't mean that I was due for a reward – it meant that I was simply fulfilling my obligation to God, whom I had claimed was my Lord and Master.

2. God told me that fasting should never be with the motive of trying to force Him to do anything. In actual fact it was meant to be a humbling process practised by Christians where they could take their minds from themselves for a period of time to concentrate on Him and His will.

3. God finally drove it home to me just who I was – Joanna Barratt – flesh and blood, and my own human nature would always desire to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. He showed me that my only chance for overcoming myself would be to feed the new nature which He had given to me when I became a Christian and to *walk* in the spirit.

When I got back home to Manchester I prayed in all sincerity that God would never ask me to do a fast like this again as I didn't want to refuse and make myself disobedient. But the very next year God told me again to fast. I am amazed at how God has taught me to trust Him because even though I knew what to expect and was scared stiff, I did what He asked and put myself at His disposal. I am very grateful that, since that initial fast, He has never put me through that same experience again. God must have been giving me a 'baptism of fire' to see if I would put myself in His hands after rough handling – I'm glad

I didn't refuse because He has treated me well and blessed me so much since.

### A humbling experience


As I look back I'm amazed at the way I thought about myself as a Christian. Before this fast I thought that I had grown, that I had changed. But God showed me that this was not so. If He had taken His hand from me at any moment I would have immediately reverted to type. The only reason for my change was the fact that I was putting spiritual laws into operation and practising what the Bible told me to do, which gave God the opportunity to alter my thinking and actions. I'm ashamed to say it, but I had accredited all these changes to my own spirituality, and without realising it had become self-righteous. What I had expected would be a 'spiritual high' turned out to be a very humbling experience, but I have since learned to thank God for these apparent times of failure, as in actual fact they are all blessings in disguise ... At least I know the truth! And the Bible says that the truth, even about myself, will set me free.



Me aged 6 months

My only family photograph: from left, Dad, me (10), Ian (14), Mum, Myra (17) holding Faith (9 months) and Tina (4) at the front.





From "It's All In The Mind: Holiness Part 2"  
Challenge Issue 10

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. You began your Christian life by changing your thinking. Did you realise that? "Repentance" simply means changing your mind. It is always our thinking that changes us. Remember the scripture from Proverbs 23:7 - "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is". The devil also knows this, and that is 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 a living sacrifice ... Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind".

## 6

### *Me - A Bigot?*

What an insinuation! I didn't even fully understand what the word bigot meant! And yet how easy it is to live in our own private world, full of bias, shaking off other people's opinions with the inward thought, "they don't understand". Often people who work for somebody very famous or wealthy can be more proud and pompous than the person they are 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 a famous man. A Granada Television film producer stumbled across him, and at Granada's own expense, made an hour-long documentary of the Barratt & Williams divine healing ministry and their church's activities, entitled simply "Sharon" (the name of the church), which was shown to 10 million people at peak viewing time on the television. The

film 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. 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 the position.

For some years Maurice and I travelled around with our minister, before his retirement, to conduct various divine healing crusades in Great Britain and a number of other countries. Maurice would arrange and conduct the meetings, I would sing the solos and provide the music for the worship part, and the minister would preach the Word and pray for the sick. We worked very closely together, being of one mind and of one spirit. All day long we would be preparing for the evening service. The minister would go into a room and pray on his own and Maurice and I would do likewise, combining our prayer with fasting on liquids only and we would not 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.

### The dregs of society

I remember one particular 10-day crusade which 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 at them at our first prayer session and thinking what a motley crew they were! I didn't know where they were coming from, having had no communication with them before, and to me 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 with Maurice and I as we didn't know anything about them. One by one they testified, and as each one spoke God dealt very severely with my pride.

## Behind the lines

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 ago he'd had a motorbike accident and had found himself wrapped around a lamppost. He was rushed to hospital and was so severely damaged that they actually needed to wire his skull together and 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 so much their condescending attitudes and the way he was 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.

This man hadn't been a churchgoer, but somehow he heard that Jesus Christ could heal him and, 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 was dramatically healed. He was a totally new man, and now he 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.

## Supernatural visitation

I turned to one of the other men 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 ruined his marriage and his life. He lived in a high-rise flat and was in constant fear of being broken into. Consequently all his windows and doors were locked, bolted and even chained!

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. Panic rose within him and he ran to the door to see whether he'd left it open – and found that it was locked, bolted and chained. He was baffled as to how this man had got into his house, and when he questioned him about what he was doing there, this man 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 was experiencing now had changed his life completely, and from that day forward, he had never taken another drink of alcohol, and had given his whole life to God.

I don't know how you would have felt if you had been listening to testimonies like these, but I felt a fraud. I had come into this working class church as a pompous, proud, arrogant Christian who had a 'ministry from God'. I had been brought up from the age of 9 in a Pentecostal church where God was moving in a dramatic way and been taught and indoctrinated with the scriptures. What I was being faced with now were people who had *met God*, and instead of hearing second hand from a preacher, they'd had a *personal revelation from God* which I'd never experienced. The testimonies of these men

really humbled me and I realised that my ‘holiness’ was all self-righteousness. Up until hearing these men I’d always thought of myself as being ‘special’, but now I was finding that I’d just had a good spiritual education.

“That’s my Jesus”

A few years ago 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 had finished our part, and Joe got up to give his testimony, God reminded me yet again of the lesson He’d taught me 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 now found himself in solitary confinement because he’d taken a chisel to somebody in the prison whom he’d cut up so badly that he was totally unrecognisable.

Solitary confinement is meant to be a very severe punishment, and during this time Joe didn’t have visitors, priests, or ministers, and his meals were passed to him in his cell and the plates taken away when he’d finished. 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 visited him and dramatically changed his life.

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 that 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 personally *knew Him*. His life was 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 warders saw the transformation and knew that this was no con job. It was for real – Paddy Whelan had met Jesus.

### Another reminder


Only a couple of months ago I was again at a Prison Fellowship Rally at the Central Hall in Manchester where I was asked to sing, and once more I was reminded of the lesson God had taught me in Birkenhead because the main speaker was a man named Jimmy Rice who had no knowledge of God, was brought up in villainy and found himself in prison. This man didn’t even know enough about Jesus to be embarrassed about being a Christian, and 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 would also need a Bible. Whilst he was having this conversation with

the prison warden, other inmates were standing around with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths, 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 met *personally by Jesus Christ Himself* and given a fresh start.

### Inspiring people

I don't know what God feels about the majority of Christians who go to church these days, but from a 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 so 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, but avidly read the Bible as though it were 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 and 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.



From "Cause And Effect:  
Holiness Part 3"  
Challenge Issue 11

Holiness is an effect, and all effects have causes. For example: daffodils and tulips will come up in March, because I planted bulbs in September. The 'effect' is daffodils in spring; but I can't get that 'effect' without a 'cause' - bulb-planting in autumn. If I have too many late nights that becomes the cause of an effect - a headache. If I take an aspirin, that's another cause - the effect is that the headache goes. And so on. Every single effect in creation has a cause behind it.

From this we can learn a vital lesson: if we want an effect, find the cause. Put the cause into operation, and the effect will come naturally, without trying. Holiness is an effect, not a cause. So, if we want to become more like Jesus, more holy, the very last thing we should do is try to be more like Jesus! That's the effect, not the cause.

We are changed from glory to glory. Change is a process. We are changed little by little, too slow for us to even notice the change. Here lies one of the reasons why so many of us fail. We hope that by one supreme effort we can somehow manage to wrench ourselves out of our old lifestyle and behaviour and into holiness, but we only change if we keep on looking at Jesus' character. We are mirrors and mirrors reflect whatever they are facing. We become what we are influenced by, whether we like it or not.

# 7

## *People Can Change!*

One of my outstanding characteristics was the ability to argue. I didn't care what method I used – logic or sarcasm – but I always made sure I won, often leaving my opponent red in the face after hearing some home truths which I'd used completely out of context! Some people believe this could be classed as a good quality, but for a Christian this attitude can never be acceptable.

I remember on one occasion when I was going through a Sunday school teacher training course that the tutor picked out 6 students to hold a debate, 3 to act as Pharisees and 3 to act as disciples. I only wish I'd been chosen to be a disciple instead of a Pharisee because I was really upset at my capacity to leave the disciples totally winded and without a leg to stand on.

It's quite amazing how wholeheartedly you can believe in something which logic and reason can totally disprove. I remember coming away from that

particular class amazed that God had enabled me to become a believer!

## Never admit defeat

I had a hard time at work too, I just couldn't handle being told what to do and would more often than not end up arguing with the boss and walking out. I didn't mean to act this way, I just had this inbuilt defence mechanism that made me act unafraid when I was scared to death. The Bible says "A soft answer turns away wrath" but throughout my life I'd never known how to give a soft answer. Right from being a child I was taught never to back down and admit defeat because "people would walk all over you", and my parents showed me practically that this was the only way to survive. I knew that my attitude caused me to have more enemies than friends, but how do you alter habits of a lifetime?

I was very fortunate to land my job at the advertising agency. Nothing about it was mundane, it was a job in a million and each day held stimulation and excitement. It was through working at the agency that I found myself involved with modelling, beauty contests and all sorts of glamorous activities. And it was here that God used me to start prayer meetings in the lunch break, but always at the back of my mind I had this lurking fear that it couldn't last and that before too long my old nature would rear its ugly head and I would argue with somebody important and be thrown out. I was constantly living

in dread of God's grace being lifted from me and, although I didn't relish God's call to work for Him full-time, I also saw this as an opportunity to bow out of the firm gracefully for perhaps the first time in my working life!

For the next 5 years I spent my time serving the Lord and working entirely amongst Christians. The only time I ever mixed in the world was when I went into an area to distribute tracts in the houses and met the people who passed by and came into the church during a "coffee morning". I had plenty of time to pray, study my Bible, write songs, record albums, and the usual topics of my conversations would be God, the church or Christianity. For a couple of years I really did experience what it was like to be "in the world and yet not of it". Because I was living by faith I didn't have a regular income; in fact this was a period in my life when I was living off other peoples benevolence from week to week. A couple of Christmases went by and I felt the embarrassment of not being able to keep up my usual standards where gifts were concerned, so I decided that this year things would be different.

### Life on the shop floor

I applied for a part time job in the local Asda supermarket and was allotted 12 hours work each week. I was then given my overall and my clock card number – something which I'd never received at any of my previous places of employment –


and I embarked on my first week with excitement at the prospect of working in a shop. During the course of this first week I remember one of the men who worked there paying me a mildly crude sort of compliment which left me both blushing and speechless. I wasn't embarrassed so much by what he had said (as sexual overtones are so much a part of male and female conversation in secular employment); what embarrassed me more was the fact that I didn't know what to say in response to his comments. I could literally feel my mind searching for the quick-witted answers that came so readily to my lips at one time, but it seemed as though in such a short space of time I'd forgotten how to banter.

A few weeks later one of the female members of staff who'd taken a dislike to me said something which was really sarcastic and cutting. Normally I would have been able to give far worse than I received, but once again I found myself speechless, not knowing what to say. These incidents were quite disconcerting and caused me much thought. I certainly hadn't wanted to remain silent, neither had I wanted to argue, but somehow I'd got out of the swing of my usual impulsive outbursts and had simply forgotten how to argue.

### The miracle of change

I realised that for the couple of years prior to my employment in the store I'd been mixing with Christians where actions and conversations were

all for and about God. Throughout this period I had not encountered sexual overtones and arguments during the course of a working day, because my mind and the minds of others had been focused on holy and godly things. For years I had prayed that God would help me to keep quiet when I was being provoked yet no matter how hard I tried my tongue had been too ready with a quick answer. Yet here I was, marvelling at the fact that I hadn't risen to the bait when provoked on these two occasions! I came to the conclusion that it is far more effective to concentrate on doing something positive rather than on not doing something negative, because without trying God had changed me ... and that's a miracle. If you really want to be holy then find somebody who is holy and stick to them like glue ... Maybe some of it will rub off on you!



From "An Introduction to the  
Sermon on the Mount"  
Challenge Issue 12

In Matthew 5:1-12 Jesus describes our goal – the qualities of character which gain us acceptance into the Kingdom – Christ's own character.

Jesus did not come to just change us outwardly. He wants to transform our inward characters. He wants to replace the works of the flesh in our lives by the fruit of the Spirit. This was Jesus' true ministry. He had compassion for people's physical and temporal welfare, certainly. And today he still heals, delivers and blesses us. But his real purpose is to transform us into his character.

Having set out the qualities we need in Matthew 5, Jesus proceeds to point out how we fall hopelessly short of the mark! The secret, inner motives of our hearts which Jesus exposes in chapter 5 can only be dealt with by another secret, inner means – secret prayer, fasting and almsgiving (chapter 6 verses 1-18). The rest of the chapter and all chapter 7 continues to deal with our motives, values and attitudes to service of God and man.

The people "were astonished at his doctrine". So are the church today! The Sermon on the Mount is too strong, too radical, too destructive to self. It's too challenging to the church. So the great majority of the church don't practice it. They may believe it, but they don't do it.

# 8

## *Learning To Swim*

“Wendy, Wendy, I can swim! I can swim!” It can be quite embarrassing sometimes being the mother of a 3-year-old child. Maurice and I had taken Nathan on holiday when I was 8 months pregnant with Izaak. Nathan had received the “Peter Pan” video for his birthday and watched it rather a lot, and had consequently started naming himself Peter and me Wendy. That was OK at home, but the problem was that he called me Wendy everywhere we were, and in some circumstances, it was quite embarrassing. As I was 8 months pregnant, Maurice took Nathan to the swimming pool each day and I would go along about 20 minutes later to see how they were doing. The last time Nathan had been swimming was when he was 10 months old so this was quite a novel experience for him, and he was always thrilled to bits to see me enter the doors. We couldn’t convince him that he wasn’t really swimming because there he was, with his rubber

ring on, floating and splashing about in the water without his feet touching the ground. I've learned a lot watching Nathan grow up, and it's caused me to look back and remember quite a few things that happened in my own life.

## Playing in the Spirit

I was the church organist from the age of 15. My Pastor was full of encouragement and before each service he would take those participating in the service into the vestry and we would pray together for the meeting. He would give us a pep talk so that we all understood what the aim of the meeting was and have a common vision in view. Nearly every time we walked onto the platform he would nudge me with his elbow and whisper softly under his breath to me, "Now, Joanna, you have to play and sing in the Spirit this morning", and I would 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 would put my heart and soul into what I was doing – until one day 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 and something had taken over even my mind, and I was no longer aware of what I was doing or where I was, it was just me and God.

Becoming a Christian is just like being born. Every

child, if fed properly, will grow daily until it becomes an adult. But unless that child has been schooled and educated it can grow up to be very stunted in its development of knowledge and experience. I was introduced to this lively Pentecostal church at the age of 9 and by the time I was 12 I'd been baptised in both water and in the Holy Spirit. Now what? It wasn't until I was about 23 years old, and Pastor Barratt started to preach the Sermon on the Mount at Sharon Church, that I realised I needed to do something practical to grow.

## Educational growth

I had a very good friendship and relationship with the Pastor's 2 daughters, and because we were all desiring to be more like God we decided to share a holiday together, but to make it more like a retreat. We planned out how we would spend our days incorporating time when we would pray and seek God together for development in our spiritual lives. Lis, who was the same age as myself, was the only one of us who had ever seen a vision, so we made her lead the meetings. During the course of that week I tried my best to leave myself open to God.

By the end of our time together both myself and Chris, his youngest daughter, were seeing visions, albeit very small pictures, but still we had learned somewhat to open ourselves up to God. Because we found so much benefit from taking holidays in this way together we decided to do this for a few years

afterwards and slowly we got to know God in a better and more deeper way and, at the same time, realised that we'd always only had our toes in the water – we'd never learned to swim.

## Living Christianity


The spiritual realm is vast and totally outside our human understanding. I'm convinced that even during a whole lifetime we could never understand God in the way He intends us to; that will only happen when we meet Him face to face in eternity. We go through a 10-week course to learn our fundamental doctrines and think we know all about Christianity instead of realising that this is only the introduction to our faith. I've found that Christianity is not something to think out, but to live out, and this is the part we all find the most difficult, and can cause us to be pharisaic. That's why Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount. These teachings are all over the Old Testament, but Jesus came to show us what God really meant when He gave us the law, and how to put it into practice as a lifestyle. I wasted a lot of time between the ages of 12 and 23 riding on my cloud of grace, but the fact is it's not how much we know, but how much we change that counts with God, and to change we have to take a good look at ourselves. The Sermon on the Mount challenges us to do just that!



On ministry  
in Wales with  
Maurice and his  
father Bill Barratt  
for the last time

How I looked  
when Nathan  
started calling  
me "Wendy"!





From "Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit"  
Challenge Issue 13

"Who then are the poor in spirit? Without question, the humble; they who know themselves", said John Wesley; and Wesley's definition of humility is the best I know. Humility is knowing yourself, having a true assessment of yourself. Pride, the opposite of humility is a false assessment of yourself. Pride makes us believe things about ourselves which are lies. It leads us to delude ourselves, and the reason is that we cannot bring ourselves to face the truth about ourselves. Seeing ourselves as we really are is uncomfortable. I'm sure we all know this, deep down. We spend time, money and effort on getting our outward appearance just as we would like it to be. We create an image for ourselves so that people will be attracted to us or think well of us. And if we are so keen to present a good physical appearance, how much more care should we take to present a respectable spiritual face to people - especially if they know we're Christians? How important is it to us that people think we are good, loving, humble, patient, generous and unselfish? And yet, how foolish. This is pride at work, protecting our reputation. Poverty of spirit involves the smashing down of all these delusions. The poor in spirit see themselves as they really are.

# 9

## *God's Grace Is Sufficient*

The idea of this book is to give people hope that the attributes listed in the Sermon on the Mount are obtainable in some measure, either small or great. There's nothing more soul-destroying than hearing a sermon on holiness, for example, and walking away with your head downcast, feeling as though you will never reach that particular pinnacle. I've realised after studying the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus never asks us to do anything that we cannot do. And if He says that we can be poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart, etc., then it's obvious that Jesus thinks this standard can be reached. I found that the worst battle is recognising what these qualities are. We often don't see them as qualities ... the truth is we often see them as times of failure that we would prefer not to talk about.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven". On casting my mind back over my life I recognise that there are many times when I've been poor in spirit, or, to use other expressions, unable to cope, out of control of a situation, or humiliated by circumstances. I suppose one of the very first times I accepted the fact that I was poor in spirit was the time I asked Jesus to come into my life and take control of it. Instead of circumstances moulding my character and making a better person out of me, they were destroying me, and making me very bitter. This acceptance of God's help is one that we like to talk about in terms of the time when we "saw the light" and "got saved", but the truth is that we need God's salvation time after time after time.

### A hard pill to swallow

For those of us who are proud by nature, being poor in spirit is one of the nastiest pills to swallow. It's very hard to admit that we are wrong or weak, and harder still to accept help in any shape or form because we like to be able to do things on our own. We think that accepting a Saviour once in our life is enough – but really we need to accept our Saviour and His help time and again during our Christian life. My wrong attitude towards bosses and people who had any authority over me caused me no end of trouble, and it took a long time for me to accept the fact that it wasn't the bosses who were at fault but me and my own character. Once I came to this

conclusion, God could do something in my life to change me, but until I'd recognised that pride was at the root, then God couldn't do anything but carry on allowing the trials in my life, hoping that one day I would see myself as others saw me.

## The worm

Some years ago God gave me a vision. I saw a worm standing upright like a man. It was even dressed like a man wearing a top hat and tails, and looked very grand. The worm joined itself to a group of other men who were poring over the scriptures, having fellowship together, discussing Moses. Immediately the worm identified himself with this great man and thought to himself, "The meekest man on earth! Yes, I can identify with that; I think I'm meek!" He heard about Abraham's faith and thought, "Yes, I can relate to that; I have faith too". People looked on at this ludicrous spectacle, a worm kidding itself that it was a great man. The people could see the folly of it, but the worm couldn't.

However, God was watching the worm, and in compassion set down a mirror in front of it. The worm didn't realise it was a mirror: it thought it was seeing someone else; and immediately it thought, "How ridiculous! Look at that worm dressed up like a man!" But when the worm moved, the figure in the mirror also moved, and gradually it dawned on the worm that the foolish figure in the mirror was itself, and it fell flat on the floor. Its hat flew off, its

coat flew off, and it was left on the ground, a naked, wriggling worm.

God looked down and saw all this. But instead of despising the worm, He had compassion on it. Reaching down His hand, he picked the worm up and coiled it around His finger like a ring. Then God pointed His finger and did mighty things. Demons were cast out and great deliverance's happened, and God said, "I can use worms!"

## Ready for a breakdown

A few pages back I wrote about the dilemma I'd been in after having my first child, Nathan. I'd had a very regular and disciplined prayer life for a long time, and was suddenly plunged into my new role of motherhood where so many unexpected demands were being made upon my time. Prior to Nathan being born, Maurice and I had allotted a 10 week recovery period for me before accepting ministry engagements, because I had anticipated the baby being born on the due date, and being totally capable of handling the situation – yet in reality I had no idea what this would cost. We took our 10-week-old child to America for 4 weeks, came home for 10 days, and then embarked on another tour of Holland which lasted 5 weeks. The endless spiral of looking after my baby during the day, ministering in the evening at meetings up to 3 hours away from our base, and breast-feeding at hourly intervals during the night, took its toll; and at the end of the 5 week tour I

felt ready for a nervous breakdown. The thought of the imminent tour planned in Scotland filled me with dread and before leaving Holland for home, I told Maurice that he should ring the ministers and let them know I wouldn't be going. I felt certain God had told me this was the only way out and, indeed, this was the only thing that relaxed my mind. I don't think I'd ever recognised being literally poor in spirit before this situation, and each night I went to minister with Maurice I felt like a terrible hypocrite, because I knew that I had not had the opportunity that day to read my Bible or pray, and if I had managed to snatch some moments, my mind had not been able to take in anything I'd read, as my concentration level was so low.

### God speaks plainly

Being hormonally imbalanced didn't help the situation, and I cried out to God in desperation asking Him to help me. A few weeks after our Dutch tour Maurice took Nathan and I away on holiday and we visited a church where nobody knew our present circumstances, and God spoke very clearly to me. The minister preached about Simon Peter who had been a radical disciple of Jesus and had received the call of God on his life – and yet, when the crisis came, he denied Christ and ended up going back to his former lifestyle. But the story didn't end there. Jesus came to him after He had risen from the dead and gave him a second call, in which he did exactly

the same miracle, and told Peter that God really did want to use him. Jesus didn't speak to Peter of his failure, He just emphasised the fact that God had called him for His service.

The minister then spoke plainly and said that as far as God was concerned, circumstances weren't important, but the call was. Yes, the call is important, not the circumstances. This phrase went right home into my spirit and God used it mightily to change my attitude. At the end of the service I went out to the front of the church and re-dedicated my life to God, telling Him that I knew that discipleship was costly, and if being in the ministry with a child in tow was the cross God wanted me to carry, then I would carry it for Him – especially now, knowing the cost involved. At the end of the meeting I let Maurice know how I felt, and told him that I would be accompanying Him on the Scottish tour. It was then that God began to work.

### God's help is at hand

If I had made a detailed list of the things I needed God to do to help me out of this situation, I'm absolutely positive that I wouldn't have come up with His solutions. God brought Paula, Maurice's youngest daughter, to the house. She offered to relieve me of the office work in Barratt Ministries and also come with us to Scotland as a nanny for Nathan, to take care of him each evening when I went out to minister with Maurice, or to look after him during

the day when I was feeling very tired or just needed time to pray. I was also given a financial gift from the Dutch organization which enabled me to buy a suit comprising a jacket, skirt and blouse. God even led me to the women to purchase this from, who, knowing that I was in the ministry, added two further blouses, a skirt, a pair of trousers, a pair of shoes, handbag and earrings, all co-ordinating with the jacket, enabling me to “mix and match” so much that I had about 3 or 4 outfits out of this one suit that I’d initially purchased! My difficulties had not gone away, but God certainly gave me the boost and encouragement that I so badly needed at this particular point in my life.

More problems!

This hard period passed, as it always does when children begin to grow up, and I was able to get my prayer and Bible reading back into some sort of routine, as Nathan was now able to sit on his own and look at his own picture books whilst I had a bit of quiet time in the mornings. And I didn’t have any shortage of baby-sitters to look after him in the evenings when I went out to minister. But then Izaak came along, and even though I had already experienced the trauma of having a child, I didn’t know what hit me when I had two! Whereas I’d been able to have a sleep in the afternoons with Nathan, there was no chance of this now that I had a 3-year-old child as well as a small baby. Fortunately, I’d

realised from past experience it was futile to take on engagements so soon after the birth of my child, but even so, now that I was beginning to resume my position again in the ministry, I found it very difficult having to take the baby with me. The nanny God provided for me to take care of Nathan had moved on some time before into other occupation.

Back to square one?


In a sense I felt as though I was back to square one, but the words that the minister spoke when I was so much in need still rang true in my heart: “the circumstances aren’t important, the call is”. Some days I felt really unable to cope, and had no patience whatsoever. I knew that a quiet time and some spiritual input into my life would have made all the difference, and yet I found it so difficult to get to grips with this. At Barratt Ministries we held meetings together on a couple of evenings each week, which Izaac also had to attend. I always waited with anticipation for him to fall asleep, and yet as Izaac only slept for approximately 15 minutes at a time during the day, this gave me little respite to drink in the spiritual life I so desperately needed.

Maurice saw my situation and, even though he was a very busy man, made an effort to encourage me. He took time out of his schedule to pray with me each day, and usually during this prayer session he would tend to Izaac if he caused a disturbance, which relieved me no end. I suppose, in a way, it’s

very easy to serve God when all your circumstances are ideal, and to be quite honest, before my children came along, my circumstances were ideal. My favourite phrase used to be, “Everybody does what they want to do”, but now God had allowed me to walk in other people’s shoes and things felt a little different! It’s very hard to feel poor in spirit when so much is going well for you. And without realising what is happening you can lapse into self-righteousness and pride.

## The value of trials

My situation was not what I would have chosen, but I realised its value in keeping me low. It emphasised to me that I’ve been saved by grace alone and not by my own works, capabilities or talents. God’s call on my life to serve Him is a gracious act of His loving kindness. Whatever circumstances God has to use in either your life or my life, He has to make sure that we understand and remember that we are all only dust that He has had mercy on. David talks in the Psalms about the fact that he would prefer to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord rather than to dwell in the tents of the wicked, and he meant, in essence, that he didn’t care what position he held in the Kingdom of God just as long as he was in there. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” – in other words, if we admit defeat and totally depend on God, we can be in the kingdom. We don’t have to have a fantastic position, just being there is enough.



From "Blessed Are They That Mourn"  
Challenge Issue 14

"Blessed are they that mourn." How can it possibly be a 'blessed' thing to mourn? Surely Jesus came to give us joy! So where does mourning fit into the Christian character? God has many characteristics, and if we want to be like Him, we have to share in His pain as well as His pleasures.

We may think of God as being permanently content and happy. But the Bible does not confirm this view. God has passions and emotions; He can be stirred to anger and moved to pity; and He can mourn and grieve. Does He not mourn and grieve over the things that happen in the world today? Or does He sit aloof, uncaring and uninterested, a God without a heart? We know He has a heart, and His heart can be wounded, just as ours can be.

As Jesus approached his own great battle in Gethsemane, he said to his disciples, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death" (Mark 14:34). He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy" (verse 33). Grief and mourning consumed him in that garden. Isaiah foretold the character of the Messiah: "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). And indeed the Messiah's great work was to identify with the sorrow of mankind: "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4).

## 10

# *God Can't Be Everything To Us Until He's All We've Got ...*

The day should have been wonderful. It was Nathan's 2nd birthday and I was almost 3 months pregnant, but then I saw the blood. Panic rose inside me and I found it very difficult to think clearly, but I rushed to the phone and spoke with the doctor. She told me to stay where I was and promised that she would be round to see me within the hour. After a brief check up she said that my body was trying to tell me, through these warning signals, that I was doing too much rushing around after a 2-year-old, and the best thing I could do now was rest as much as possible with my feet up (which, in the circumstances, I thought was quite laughable). She then told me that if the bleeding continued I was to go round to the maternity hospital and let them

examine me properly, and it was her opinion that they would probably keep me in for a few days to rest whilst I got over this difficult period.

The next day my condition hadn't improved, so I packed a small bag containing night wear and my bible and then added a bit of correspondence which I hoped I could catch up on during my hours of freedom from responsibility. Maurice accompanied me to the hospital and we were both taken into a room where I was interviewed. I gave them as many details as possible concerning my pregnancy after which they gave me a brief examination, and then made an appointment to go to the radiography department for a scan. As I was waiting for my name to be called I remembered my previous appointments here when I had been given the opportunity to see Nathan before he was born. They were thrilling times as I had been allowed to look inside my own body at the miracle God was performing there. This day also I felt tremendous excitement at what progress my baby would be making at this stage. I believed with all my heart that there was nothing wrong, and that I would go through the pregnancy without any problems.

### The awful verdict

I must say I felt a bit disappointed as I lay on the hospital couch because the monitor was by my head instead of my feet, so I couldn't see what was on the screen. But I could see clearly Maurice's face

and that of the radiographer, and I searched them intently for any tell-tale signs which would have given me a clue as to what was happening.

After an external scan the radiographer said that she couldn't comment yet as she couldn't properly see what was happening, so she then proceeded to give me an internal scan. Her face didn't give anything away as she called somebody over to confer with in medical jargon, and I didn't understand what they were saying. I remember asking time and again if everything was OK, but the radiographer just kept saying that she would let me know when she had reached a conclusion. She asked me to confirm my pregnancy dates which I did, she then asked me if I was sure of them, and I think at this stage I began to feel uneasy and said that maybe I wasn't so sure after all. It was then that she looked at me and said that she was very sorry but according to my dates my baby had been dead for the last 4 weeks and there was severe haemorrhaging all around my womb as my body was preparing to abort the baby.

## The grief

When I was a child I remember my father punching me in my forehead, right between my eyes, and the effect of the blow so stunned me that I reeled backwards. What the radiographer said had a similar effect, and for a moment it seemed as though her words didn't really penetrate my understanding. Nothing that the doctor had intimated so far had

prepared me for what I had just heard. They hadn't even implied that there could be a possibility that I could lose my baby. For some moments I was stunned, then I began to sob involuntarily and uncontrollably. I kept my mouth closed but my body was jerking as the silent tears came streaming down my face. "Oh God. No! Please no!" I could see the nurse was embarrassed. She pulled off a wad of tissue from a roll and gave it to me and she began to usher me into a cubicle where she said I could collect myself before I left the department.

## No recriminations

Maurice stood close to me as I sat in the cubicle and as I clung to his trouser leg I just sobbed into his clothing for the pain I felt inside was so intense. Then as I sat there, it seemed like my life passed before my eyes and I remembered all the pain I had suffered throughout my violent childhood and teens, and I suddenly realised that God had given me a new life. A strange feeling came over me as I recalled that God had changed so many of my circumstances and I began to look afresh at what God had done for me.

As I sat there I remember saying to Maurice, "I have no recriminations, God has blessed me so much". I began to thank God for Nathan, my little 2-year-old son who had already brought so much joy into my life. I thanked God for Maurice who had been the best husband anybody could ask for, who

was not only loving and caring but was also a man of God, somebody I could look up to and respect and take as my example. I thanked God also for the fact that He had called me into the ministry and given me a purpose in life which I knew was worth while. And then like Job I could say with all sincerity, "God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord". In a matter of moments I felt as though I understood that God knew what He was doing and that if He had decided that this child should not see life then His decision was good enough for me, and I accepted it. I wiped my face, blew my nose, and took the results from the scan to the lady who had interviewed me at first.

### A lesson to be learned

After reading the results of the scan the doctor told me that I ought to stay in the hospital and have an operation to have the dead child removed from my womb. Although I had come expecting to be kept in for a few days, I was now very reluctant to stay. All sorts of thoughts loomed up in my mind and I found myself hoping that God would change His mind concerning what He had decided to do with my baby. I knew God could perform miracles, I knew God could give life, and I was just hoping that God would change His mind. Although my baby was dead I didn't want anybody to take it from me, I wanted to nurse it a little longer. In the end Maurice made me see sense and I agreed to stay and have the

operation.

Once I was established on the ward the kind nurses tried to give me information on people who had had miscarriages in the hope that I could cope with the situation. But I didn't feel the need to read any of the material; what I was being faced with now was a lesson which needed to be learned – was I prepared for God to be the Lord of my life? Could I honestly say, “Thy will be done”? As I pondered these questions I knew the answer was yes; no matter what the cost, the answer would always be yes. Once my decision was made I felt my mind relax and the peace return into my heart. A couple of days later I came home from hospital and picked up the threads of life, and, to be honest, I thought I had coped with the situation very well indeed.

## The pain returns

A few weeks after this event I happened to be flicking through a magazine and came across an article which pictured a woman holding a new-born baby. A gush of emotion suddenly came over me and I wept uncontrollably, feeling what seemed like an awful physical pain inside my heart. I was quite surprised at my reaction because until then I had felt as though I had handled the situation very well. There were times too when I would see a pregnant woman in the street and feel grief begin to rise within me and a sense of despair at what could have been, and I would again cry and feel that seemingly

physical pain in my heart. These experiences bothered me and I remember praying and asking God why it was that I felt this way, and God told me that although I had accepted His decision concerning my baby, I had actually resented it.

This truth was also emphasised by the fact that I had continually prayed and asked God to give me another child, as I didn't want Nathan to be brought up on his own. I was 42 years old and knew that time was running out for me. I was so desperate for another child that I even enquired about adoption, but was informed that because I was over 35 years of age I was considered to be too old. Then, months later, in prayer I finally made my peace with God and told Him that I would not only accept, but also be happy with His decision and that from now on I would never pressurise or pester Him again by asking Him for another child. He alone knew the future, and knew exactly what I could, and could not, cope with. I then gathered the whole stack of baby clothes and equipment that I had saved after having Nathan and gave it all to somebody 100 miles away. In my mind I had closed a chapter of that particular book and was not only **saying** to God that I was happy with His decision, but I was also **proving** it with my actions.

## The God of surprises

A fortnight after all the baby things had gone out of the house I was sick 2 mornings on the run, and I mentioned this to Maurice, who told me with

confidence that I was pregnant! When I asked him to qualify his statement he said that God had woken him from his sleep just a few nights before, and told him very clearly that He was going to give him another son. Maurice had been so convinced this was the voice of God that he had written it down in his diary, which he brought to show me. 10 days after this God gave me a dream, during which He told me that I was to name the child I was carrying Izaac. From that moment I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that no matter what went on during this pregnancy, Izaac would be born as a gift to Maurice and myself from God, not because I had pressurised Him into giving it to us, but because it was His will that we should have this child.

### Life is a gift


I realise that not everyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one can be consoled the way I was, but I know we all go through the same emotions and sense of utter despair at our loss. The experience can either make us turn away from God and become hard and bitter, or it can turn us towards God and make us more soft and sensitive towards others in similar circumstances. It's a certainty that we will all experience losing loved ones during our lifetime if we live for any length of time. The bible advises us to "number our days" and spend them wisely, and nothing I know makes us appreciate the brevity of life more than losing someone close. We take so

much for granted. Life is a gift, yet we all make so many demands upon God for that life. Someone once said that “God can’t mean everything to us until He’s all we’ve got”, and I found with my miscarriage that when my heart was the sorest, God was the only One who could pour on the balm I needed to ease the ache and pain of my awful loss. Knowing God really does bring comfort.

Blessed are they that mourn

Jesus is now our intercessor, and an intercessor’s life is marked by sorrow and grief. Mourning is still his garment as he pours out his soul to his Father on our behalf. The time for triumph and victory will come later. Until then, he is still our High Priest.

Is today a day for rejoicing or for mourning in the church? The tragic decline of Christian standards in our nation in the last 3 decades is enough in itself to tell us that the light has gone out in Britain. It is a time for mourning, a time for intercession, a time for repentance and humbling ourselves before God, pleading with Him to have mercy on us, forgive our sin, and heal our land.



From "Blessed Are The Meek"  
Challenge Issue 15

In Numbers 12 we read that Moses had an Ethiopian wife. His elder brother and sister spoke against him because of this and tried to usurp his authority. "And the Lord heard it" (Numbers 12:2). Aaron and Miriam had a valid point, according to God's law Moses should not have married a foreign wife. But God took offence, even though they seemed to be right. He came to Moses' defence very suddenly, telling them plainly that Moses was His choice, His friend, and that they should not have dared to speak to him like that. God's anger rose up against them and Miriam was left with leprosy. Why did God defend Moses, even though he had violated a commandment? The answer is in verse 3: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth". It seems from the scripture that Moses hardly had time to defend himself, even if he'd wanted to. God intervened immediately. That's what God does for the meek. Look at Moses' attitude. Not only did he refuse to defend himself, he also refused to bear a grudge. Instead of adopting a "serves you right" attitude towards Miriam, Moses "cried unto the Lord, saying, 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee!'" (Numbers 12:13).

# 11

## *Putting Down The Boxing Gloves*

“We thank you for replying to our advertisement, but the response was so great that we are unable, at this time, to offer you an interview...” Although I was getting used to receiving these letters through the post, the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach was still there. I needed a permanent job. After 7 years of working for the church on a voluntary basis, and being housed for that period by a couple of its members, I now found myself in a flat on my own again.

The fact that I had not worked in offices for the past 7 years was not helping the situation, as technology had improved and advanced at a tremendous rate. In my last employment an electric typewriter proved that you were a worthy secretary, but now people were using electronic typewriters and word-processors. I knew that these inventions had been brought out to make the secretary’s life easier, but my potential bosses were always reluctant

to take on “inexperienced” employees.

For a while I found work through a temporary services bureau, but was always on the look out for a permanent position, as I needed the security of a regular income to enable me to pay the rent and bills etc. I found it quite amusing therefore to be assigned temporary work in a company where I had been refused even an interview, especially as the job I had applied for had not yet been filled, and that was the job I was assigned to do!

Progress at last!

William Press and Leonard Fairclough, two big property development companies, had amalgamated to become AMEC Properties, and they were setting up a branch office in the middle of Manchester. Because the company was brand new, and there were only a few employees, my role was that of ‘Girl Friday’, which meant doing anything for everybody, and I loved every minute of it, from washing pots and brewing up to taking shorthand notes at board meetings. I found it challenging and exciting and had an overview of the whole of the company’s dealings.

I did my job well and it wasn’t long before I was asked to stay as a permanent member of staff. By now a lot of other people had also been employed for specific jobs and we were all told there were prospects for promotion in the future as the company developed.

To be honest it wouldn’t have mattered to me

what post I held, because my priority was to bring in a regular wage to give me security. But as more staff came in on the ground level, I found that my own position was being promoted extremely rapidly until I became personal assistant to the Senior Surveyor. As the manager and his secretary, together with a few surveyors, had already been transferred from another branch of William Fairclough to set up this particular company of AMEC, it came as quite a surprise to me to realise that I had landed the highest job available to staff being recruited. My new job entitled me to a superb salary, plus a clothing allowance, as I would be in regular contact with clients and would be expected to dress with class so as to represent my company, which had world- wide repute.

### The trials begin

Whilst setting up this company we had to work around builders' rubble as the premises had not yet been fully refurbished, and that meant that the secretaries and clerical staff all had to share a general office. I loved my job but found it very difficult to cope with the jealousies stirred up in the hearts of the people I was working with, and the girls in my office were particularly hurtful with the bitchy remarks that they made. My years of voluntary work for the church had a profound effect upon me and I no longer wanted to argue or retaliate to their provocation. Instead I tried to make peace, as the bible instructed that I should do, hoping that my

kind words would turn away their wrath. But instead of appeasing them it seemed that my behaviour incensed them all the more, and they saw the kindness' that I tried to do for them as 'creeping', and they thought I was acting with 'such innocence' when all the time I was covering up my 'deceitful condescension!'

### Sent to Coventry

I was bemused by their accusations, but no matter what I did I couldn't convince them. Things went from bad to worse and I went through a particularly harrowing time when all the girls 'sent me to Coventry'. I would never have believed that such a schoolgirl prank could hurt a grown woman so effectively. For days on end I was totally ignored; they would neither look at nor speak to me, and when it was absolutely essential for them to communicate they would leave curt notes on my desk. I felt totally alone and unwanted as they laughed, joked and ridiculed over my head. Although I loved the job, I hated the working environment. I desperately wanted to leave, but I'd already experienced how hard it was to find a permanent position with a stable income. I knew God had allowed this trial for some reason, and although I tried hard to put on a brave face my heart was crying out in tears to God as I asked Him for help.

### God's answer

Although my boss asked me what the problem was, I hadn't known him for very long and so didn't feel confident enough to share my feelings. Fortunately, he took the situation into his own hands, and within a matter of days my desk and typewriter had been removed from the general office and put into his own. I was then told that from now on I would be working in his office – something which was totally unheard of! The girls in the general office were infuriated by this action, but it was a tremendous blessing for me to be away from their childish attitudes. I felt like a maiden being rescued by the knight in shining armour, and, under his protection, I became more and more involved in my job and my potential seemed boundless. My working relationship with my boss could not have been better, and I often felt as though I knew the job so well that I was literally an extension of him.

### Patience rewarded

As the months passed, God began to work, and I could see my patience paying off as one by one, my enemies began to leave, and replacements were found to fill their positions. By this time all the refurbishment to our offices were completed and we were rehoused. I was placed in an office next to my boss which was quite apart from everyone else. Some time later the existing manager left and a new one came in and, after a week of working in the department, made a request to our head office

in London that I be moved from my present position to work as his personal assistant on the grounds that I knew the job so well. My boss later jubilantly informed me that this request had been overruled by the Managing Director, who regularly made visits to our Manchester branch, because he'd recognised the excellent teamwork between my boss and myself and he was very reluctant to break us up.


This type of loyalty from bosses was totally alien to me, and as I viewed my situation I was constantly amazed to see how God had removed all my enemies and placed allies alongside me who respected rather than resented me for the position I was in. And the clients wined and dined me so regularly that I sometimes wondered who was more important – the boss or the assistant!

## In demand

As time went by, my touring engagements for the ministry became more regular, and although I was allotted quite a number of weeks holiday each year, these still weren't enough and I had to ask for further time off. Though I requested leave without pay, I found that the company were still paying my salary, and it became increasingly difficult for me to ask for time off.

Consequently I handed in my notice as I could see that the ministry was taking over, but even then my bosses tried to work out a situation where they could still employ me when I wasn't out on ministry.

It was very novel for me to feel in such demand! Obviously, the end of the story is that I finally left my employment; but what a testimony to the way God can turn events if we don't retaliate and allow Him to deal in all our circumstances as He sees fit! The bible says, "The meek shall inherit the earth", referring to the future kingdom, but just imagine what we could enjoy now if only we'd 'put down the boxing gloves' and allow God to fight for us.



From "Blessed Are They Who  
Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness"  
Challenge Issue 16

We all understand the free gift of righteousness by faith, but Jesus tells us to hunger and thirst after righteousness. This can only be the fruit of righteousness: that is, living in a right manner. In Hebrews Paul encourages Christians to fight the fight of faith: "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord ... For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth ... Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:4-11). Here we see that our trials, the chastenings that the Lord puts us through, produce righteousness in us. If we allow Him to deal with us, chasten us, and put us through trials, then it will yield the fruit of righteousness: it will cultivate and nurture in us the attitude of faith which produces righteousness. In our trials, we hunger and thirst. Chastening is a painful thing. But we will be filled afterwards with the fruit of righteousness.

## 12

# *“My Meat Is To Do Your Will, O God!”*

It was 9 o'clock and time for the meeting to close. Although I loved being the church organist, and receiving praise for my spirituality from many of the members, I often found it quite awkward not being able to slip out at the end of the meeting if it was going on a bit too long. I just hoped that they would hurry up with the closing hymn and that God wouldn't 'move' to delay me any longer. The meeting finally came to a close. I switched off the organ and put the covers over it and, after saying some very hasty farewells, made my exit as quickly as possible through the church doors and ran to catch my bus home. The journey was very short but it seemed to take an age before the bus reached my stop, and as I looked at my watch I saw the minutes tick away speedily. After alighting at my bus stop I ran all the way home to my bedsit and, as quickly

*“My Meat Is To Do Your Will, O God!”*

as I could, took off my church clothes and dressed myself in more glamorous evening wear.

At ten o'clock my doorbell rang and I ran outside to get into the flashy, expensive car that was waiting for me. My companion was very worldly and very wealthy and, to my naive 23-year-old senses, the experience of being accompanied by him to the discos and clubs of Manchester was indeed very heady. Although the glamour and glitter of the nightclubs was exciting I found that my evenings were always marred by a small voice which kept telling me that God would not like what I was doing. No matter how often I tried to shrug off this irritating knowledge I found that I was forever looking over my shoulder and hoping that nobody would recognise me, for I absolutely dreaded coming into contact with another church member who would possibly expose me. I tried hard to be a Christian even in these ungodly surroundings, and for a while my Christian principles and 'goodness' was respected, but I knew that this wouldn't last for long.

### Trapped in a web

My spirit was passionate about God, but I was young and my carnal desires craved the excitement that was being offered to me. My guilty conscience made me nervous and edgy, and the fact that I had to ask forgiveness from God so many times for the same thing made me too ashamed to pray, and I eventually lost my close relationship with

God. I still went to church and carried on my usual functions, but something inside me was dying, and I knew deep within me that this had been the better part of my life. I tried once again to pray but this time the prayer was different. I didn't only ask for forgiveness, but in a flood of tears I asked God to get me out of the mess I was in. During this particular time of prayer God spoke to me through a vision and I saw myself caught in a huge spider's web, totally trapped and helpless, and then He showed me the huge black spider lurking in the shadows, just waiting until all the fight had gone out of me before it would come and suck the life from me. I knew that the spider represented the devil and that the life being sucked from me was the spiritual life that God had put into me, and this vision only caused my prayer to become more desperate.

### An unexpected answer

Within a matter of days I became ill with a terrible bout of flu. When the doctor saw me in his surgery he told me off for not requesting a home visit because I shouldn't have left my bed with such a fever. For the next 7 days I was really ill and extremely weak, and on the 7th day a relative came to visit who wasn't aware that I was sick. I was really delighted to have some company at last and Janet\* sat on the bed and we chatted together very amicably. But it wasn't long before the conversation took a different turn and she began to criticise some people from the church who had put themselves out

to help her through a few particularly harrowing experiences. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and reprimanded her quite sharply for the wicked things she was saying. Janet was a 'yo-yo Christian'. When she was committed she seemed to be really on fire, but when she was backslidden she was up to all sorts of mischief, and she was so inconsistent that I never knew what condition I would find her in when I next met her. She had been delivered from demonic influences on numerous occasions and it didn't take me long to realise that she had allowed them back in. I voiced my knowledge to her and immediately her attitude changed, her face took on a completely different expression and she said in a voice that didn't sound like hers, “Janet loves you, but I hate you, and I want to kill you!”

### The grip of fear

I knew that what I had just heard was a demon talking to me and suddenly my heart began to pound as fear struck into me. I knew Janet well and, even with her natural strength, she was capable of carrying out this threat. I searched around madly in my mind as to what I should do next and, plucking up as much courage as I could muster, flung my arms around her and pulled her close to me telling her that I loved her and wanted her to be free from this terrible evil influence. But she just pushed me away and repeated what she had previously said.

I was so terrified that I could feel my body going

limp. I got out of bed, went to my handbag for my purse, and took some money out of it to make a phone call. I was living in a house which was divided off into bedsits and in the hall was a communal pay phone. When I told Janet I just needed to call someone she knew immediately that I was going to ring the minister of the church, and she followed me to listen to the conversation. My heart was pounding so loudly I could hardly hear what the minister was saying on the other end of the phone, and all the time I could visualise her hands coming around my throat to throttle me. Finally the conversation finished and the minister promised he would come round as soon as he possibly could to pray for her.

### A time of terror

We both went back into my bedsit. Janet stood in front of the gas fire, but I remained close to the door. Just like something out of a horror movie, the lights suddenly went out as my electric meter ran out of money, and all I could see of Janet was a silhouette lit up by the fire behind her. Then a terrible moan came from her throat which sounded as though it was coming from the very pit of hell. Terror struck me so forcibly that I ran out of the room, up the stairs, and locked myself in the toilet. She came after me and began to hammer on the door in an effort to break it down, but after a few minutes of wasted energy she decided to go back down stairs and then, after a few more minutes of realising that I wasn't going

to come out of the toilet, she finally left the house.

## Help arrives

All this time I was speaking in tongues and looking out of the toilet window waiting for the minister’s approach. My conscience was giving me a terrible time because I knew that if I’d been a real Christian I would have been able to deal with the situation and helped Janet by casting the devil from her. But I knew that I was living a hypocritical life and that, in the state I was in, the devil would have just laughed at me.

At last I saw the minister’s car approach and it was only then that I dared to leave the toilet. After letting him in the house I made us both a cup of tea and we sat down to talk. My hands were shaking really badly and I was in a terrible state of fear, but after he had listened to my story I was amazed at what happened next.

My pastor told me that he could see a white rabbit on the hearth rug cracking open nuts which contained lovely sparkling jewels. He could see it so clearly that he asked me if I could see it too, but I couldn’t – he was seeing a vision. He then told me that the rabbit changed colour and became a black rabbit and, even though it was still cracking nuts open, this time the insides were completely different as they were full of rottenness and stank. He said that the rabbit kept changing from white to black and from black to white, and I knew immediately what he was

saying. God was telling me that He could see I was living a double life and that I was the rabbit.

## Incredible encouragement

A dreadful fear of God began to well up within me. I knew that I couldn't hide from God's gaze and I was terrified that He would tell the minister everything that I had been doing. The vision continued and the minister looked at me and saw my arm begin to grow and become very strong, muscular and hairy like a man's. Then he could see me picking up a sword and wielding it with supernatural strength, and he told me that God would make me very strong if I would be fully committed to Him.

The vision went on to give me incredible encouragement when all the time I'd expected that God would reveal my sin and bring awful judgement and condemnation upon me. I was so relieved by the turn of this vision that I began to cry and, as I sobbed my heart out, I asked the minister if he would allow me to say a little prayer. I knew that God had allowed my sickness and sent Janet to scare me so that He could face me up with my own hypocrisy, because God wanted to deliver me completely from the web I was trapped in. I thanked God from the very bottom of my heart for His mercy and loving kindness towards me, and told Him that if He wanted me so badly that He would arrange all these circumstances just to set me free, then He could have me – completely.

*“My Meat Is To Do Your Will, O God!”*

The light comes on


It felt like I'd been connected to the electricity because my mind and body seemed to be charged with such resolution and power. When the minister left I rang my companion to tell him that from now on I was going to be a 'real' Christian and would be breaking off my association with him. He'd heard all this before as I'd made many efforts to be free, so he came round to see me. But God had given me such backbone and determination now that even he could see that there was no point in trying to dissuade me.

My mind was made up. God really did deliver me, and from that time I have been a totally changed person, and I know that there is nothing on this earth quite like being right with God. To have a free conscience and to be at peace with God is incredibly valuable, and often only appreciated when we've experienced falling into sin. I am just like everybody else, a weak Christian, and will make many mistakes during my lifetime – but I know where to get my food now. I've tasted righteousness and I'm determined that I shall never go hungry again.

\* Name changed to protect person's identity



Nathan has his brother — Izaac — at last!



From "Blessed Are The Merciful"  
Challenge Issue 17

Mercy and grace are two different things. We often identify the one with the other, but they are not the same. Mercy is an act, a decision or choice to not punish. Grace is a mark of character, a general attribute. We can 'grow in grace', but we cannot 'grow in mercy'. God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you", not "my mercy". Grace is an attribute, like strength or weakness; mercy is an act. There is a scripture which mentions both mercy and grace and illustrates the difference between them: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). In the Old Testament, the 'mercy seat' was indicative of God's acts of mercy and forgiveness. In the New Testament, the 'throne of grace' is indicative of God's character, and from that throne of grace we can obtain an act of mercy. Mercy is God making the decision to give us grace.

Why does God favour us when we are merciful? Because it's His character to be merciful. God has always declared that He is merciful, and He has always shown mercy.

# 13

## *Freedom Through Failure*

There are 2 categories of Christians – followers and disciples. We all start out our Christian life as followers, and indeed that was exactly what Jesus called people to do ... follow him. But somewhere along the line we are all given an opportunity for this state to change. I remember an incident some years ago which changed my life forever.

From the very first time I met Sarah\* we really hit it off together. I was busy using the vacuum cleaner in my lounge one day when I heard a knock at the patio window, and as I looked up I saw Sarah waving to me from the other side of the glass. Maurice and I had been conducting a crusade in Scotland a short time before and he had told Sarah that she would be very welcome to visit us at Barratt Ministries any time she wanted to come. She'd decided there and then that she was going to take him up on his offer, and without thinking to let us know, she arrived with her baggage on the doorstep with the intention of

staying for a long weekend. She was with us for the next 3 weeks.

As it was a sunny day when Sarah arrived, I went into the garden and invited her to sit with me at our garden trestle table, where she embarked on the story of her life. I'd never met her before and she seemed very chatty and friendly as her story poured from her lips. I couldn't honestly believe what she was saying to me although I knew she was telling the truth. Her appearance told me that she was quietly spoken, sweet, gentle and very ladylike - and yet her story told me that she'd come from a very different background altogether.

## Hell's Angel

Sarah had delved quite deeply into witchcraft and drugs and had been a member of a motorbike chapter akin to 'Hell's Angels'. She had done some despicable things in her past and hadn't been averse to casting spells on people. In fact she and some of her mates had cast a spell on the assistant minister of the church where her parents were members – the very church we had been invited to conduct our crusade.

After casting the spell they rang to tell the assistant minister of the church what they had done and prophesied that he would have a fatal car crash very soon. Obviously he was not frightened by what they said and told them that he was under the protection of God, and nothing they could do to him

would harm him – but then he had a car crash! He wasn't killed, but he still had a car crash!!

## A miracle happens

Sarah's parents and the whole church kept her under special prayer asking that God would bring her to complete deliverance from all the things she was involved in. Sarah would not entertain any conversation whatsoever about Jesus Christ or God when her parents tried to speak to her, so therefore she was absolutely stunned to find herself actually inside the church her parents attended, when in actual fact she had intended to be meeting a friend at the pub! From her own lips she had asked the taxi driver to take her to that particular church in Scotland, and even as she was telling me the story I could see that she was still astonished that this had come out of her own mouth, as she had no recollection whatever of saying it.

## Alive for God

But that was the day God had planned to meet Sarah, and she didn't leave the church until she was totally delivered. Her life was transformed – and that is an understatement. She was alive and burning for God and very spiritually aware indeed, probably because of her spiritual involvement in other areas. She seemed to know without anybody telling her what was and was not acceptable, and because she'd enjoyed our ministry so much whilst

we were on crusade in Scotland she wanted to come and have personal fellowship with us so she could be built up in her Christian life. She wasn't yet filled with the Holy Ghost, and during the course of her time with us she asked us on numerous occasions to pray that she would be, but nothing happened. Then on the last night that she spent with us, God intervened and she opened her mouth to pour out the beautiful language God had baptised her with in a very demonstrative way.

### A great witness

During her visit I was working on another album and we were using a secular professional recording studio to do our recording. We took Sarah along with us as I know it's very exciting for people to see a recording studio at first hand. Whilst we were there she got into conversation with the directors who seemed so overwhelmed with her testimony that they actually invited her out to dinner. We were told later by one of them that he, and the other directors who were husband and wife, had listened to her story over their meal with rapt attention and amazement as she bore witness to them of what the Lord had done for her.

I know that Sarah made a big impression upon them and was very grateful that God had sent her to us because for a long time we had been sowing seeds at the recording studio and Sarah seemed to make a big statement. From that time on we kept in

touch with Sarah and she became a very close friend. She had been such a blessing to have around that we invited her back again the next year.

Her visit coincided with bonfire night. At the recording studios, instead of having a Christmas party as other firms usually do, they decided to have a bonfire night party to which they invited members of staff and all their clients, who included radio and TV personalities and celebrities working in the entertainment field. Maurice and myself were also invited. Because they had heard that Sarah was with us at this particular time they asked if we could also bring her. We saw this as a great opportunity because who knows what the Lord could have done on such a night as this. We took Sarah along quite happily.

## Devastated

The place was buzzing with people and there was lots of food and drink for everybody. During the course of the evening we got separated, Maurice and I mingled with friends and Sarah got chatting with other people, it wasn't until a couple of hours later that one of the directors came to tell me that he had put Sarah into a taxi and sent her home to our house as she was blind drunk and had been verbally abusing their very important clients. I could see from the expression on the director's face that Sarah's behaviour had been absolutely intolerable, and both Maurice and I were devastated at the

outcome of the evening.

We drove home as quickly as possible from the party and found Sarah in the guest room at our house, totally inebriated. Being the woman I felt it my duty to help her into bed, and as I did so she vomited all over the new quilt that I had just bought and the new carpet that had just been laid. I looked at her disgusted and very angry. I went to bed myself some time later but I couldn't sleep. I was so disturbed that I had to get up and go into the prayer room where I begged an answer from God as to why He should allow such a thing to happen.

For years we had been witnessing and 'living the life' in front of the people at the studio, during which time we had built up really good relationships, and many of the barriers and defences had come down so that people could be honest with us and not be afraid to discuss deep and personal things.

I knew that the directors had been very angry indeed at what had taken place. They had accepted Sarah because they respected Maurice and I so much, but I knew without any words being spoken by them that her behaviour tonight was a direct reflection upon us, and I felt awfully embarrassed with the situation we had been plunged into.

### The servant's choice

I prayed aloud for quite a while but it seemed that the heavens were as brass and I couldn't get any peace in my mind. Eventually I decided to open

the bible at random and ask God to direct me to a place where I should read for my answer. I opened the Bible at Exodus 21 and read the first 6 verses, but couldn't for the life of me understand why God had directed me to such a scripture, as it all seemed to be about a servant's attitude towards his master after a 6 year period of service. If the slave had not enjoyed working for his master he was entitled to go out free, but if he decided that he loved his master and wanted to stay, then his master was obliged to take him to the door post and pierce his ear through with an awl and put a ring in it, and this would be a sign to everybody that the slave was now there through choice, not because he had been bought and had no say in the matter.

### Decision time

I stared for ages at these verses trying to understand what God was saying – and then suddenly He gave me the revelation. I remembered what Sarah had told me about becoming a Christian. As far as she was concerned she hadn't even intended to go to church, let alone be delivered from all those terrible things she had been involved with. For years she had been totally ruled by the devil, and then suddenly God intervened and gave her a chance to see what it would be like to be ruled by Him. It was now time for Sarah to make her own decision as to whom she wanted to serve. She could either return to her former lifestyle and serve the devil,

or else she could stay under God's protection and be a Christian. God had been very kind allowing her to see both camps, but hers was the decision to say either, "I will go out free", or "Pierce my ear, Lord".


## The risk God takes

God then began to remind me of my own past life, particularly concerning the incident I wrote about in the last chapter of this book, and I realised that every single one of us, at some point in our Christian walk, has to make the decision for ourselves whether we will serve God from choice or because we have been forced. So many things began to fall into place in my mind as to why God allows us to fall into sin and make so many stupid mistakes. Whatever condemnation and guilt I had suffered up until that point was completely removed because I realised God needed to face me, like He was doing to Sarah, with the truth about myself so that I could make a rational decision concerning my future. From the very moment that I made my decision that God could pierce my ear and have rights to my life, I know that things have been very different – I made a wise choice.

God takes that risk with every single one of us. We could choose to go in the opposite direction but, nevertheless, God makes sure that we make our own decision without any pressure from Him, because He's given us all a free will and He's after heartfelt love and not forced love. My attitude to all weak

and struggling Christians has totally changed since God gave me this revelation. I no longer condemn and judge, because I understand the process that has to take place in their lives. The man in the bible who was condemned so harshly for not forgiving his brother his debt was only treated like this because he had forgotten that he too had once owed a tremendous debt that he hadn't been able to pay, but had received forgiveness and mercy. Christ told us this story in the bible to give us an example – to follow and copy!

\* Name changed to protect person's identity



From "Blessed Are The Pure In Heart"  
Challenge Issue 18

"Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled" Titus 1:15. Does God know each of our hearts automatically? Or does He need permission from us to gain access to our hearts? He knows mankind's heart generally, as we can see from Genesis 6:5-6. Jesus, too, 'knew what was in man' (John 2:25). But as for the secrets of each individual heart, it seems that people have to ask God to search them, as David did. Without us giving God the right to do so, we have no guarantee that He will. He may just leave us to it. Certainly, we need to give God the right to change our hearts, once He has revealed them to us. And this is a relevant point, because it is the only way to get a pure heart. We cannot become pure ourselves. God has to change us.

# 14

## *Bad Company Corrupts Good Morals*

Saturday again. With our pockets full of money my friend and I caught the bus to Belle Vue Amusement Park. It's now closed but when I was a kid it used to house a circus big top, a zoo and a funfair where you could purchase all sorts of amusing rides. It also had a little booth in which you could record your voice. It was similar to the photo booths we have today. You could insert money into a slot, talk or sing into the microphone and after waiting some minutes, a 78 record would appear out of the machine. I recorded my first album "Greensleeves" on one of these contraptions!

My friend and I had been going to this funfair for a few weeks and I was getting quite blasé about it, but at first I remember feeling very nervous and frightened.

I was 13 years old and had already had a good

education at Sunday School. A very well known verse to all of us Sunday School children was “Be sure your sins will find you out”. As God’s wrath hadn’t fallen upon me immediately I began to think He didn’t view me as the sinner after all, but regarded my friend as the culprit.

### Living on the bread line

I grew up in Wythenshawe, a very poor district of Manchester, made up of the ‘working class’ and those on the ‘dole’. My friend lived in a house at the top of the avenue where I lived and was 13 years old like myself. At that particular time her father had a job with an insurance company and he used to go round the houses collecting the clients payments every week. When he came home each evening his pockets would be stuffed full with money and during the night my friend used to rifle through them and take out some of the collections. Some weeks my friend and I would have as much as £20 each to spend, which was a fortune back in the 60’s, and what we didn’t get rid of at Belle Vue we would use during the week to purchase sweets and chocolates and all sorts of trivial things. I’d never known what it was like to have money before and the experience was terrific, with so much money I could even afford to be benevolent!

From as far back as I can remember Mum always seemed to have financial struggles. Although Dad had a job, he was on the sick quite a lot of the time

for one reason or another, some of which I remember were genuine! During this period of my life Dad used to give Mum £10 each week and out of that she paid the rent, gas, coal, electricity, bus fares, food and clothes. Consequently she learned how to make her money stretch and we were always taught the art of thrift. We would go to the baker's shop just before closing time on Saturday evenings or very early on a Monday morning for any stale bread that they might still have left over. This was also the way we purchased our vegetables, and as far as meat was concerned we were always amazed at what the butcher was prepared to sell as 'scraps for the dog'. Mum would take us to jumble sales and instruct us to buy really big garments which we would bring home, unpick, cut out again and remake into more stylish clothes for ourselves.

### A deceptive gift

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

Mum could hardly believe her eyes. After all, £5 was half her normal weekly income. She began to

jump around the living room with her arms raised in the air shouting “Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Thank you Jesus!” She also tried to thank me but I couldn’t take it. She honestly believed that God had given her that money, and suddenly the stark reality of what I was doing stared me in the face – she’d been ‘blessed’ because I was a thief. My hands hadn’t personally taken the money, but my hands had readily accepted and spent it, and the bald truth of what I had done filled me with shame. Without realising it Mum was thanking Jesus for my crime, and I felt awfully embarrassed.

### Fear of debt

Throughout my life I’ve had to manage the small amounts of money I’ve earned. At 16 I left home and with only a very meagre wage coming in each week I found myself a flat. My rent was £3, then there was gas, electricity, travelling expenses to and from work, tights and personal needs, and with what was left I would purchase food. Out of £5.50 there wasn’t usually much left, and my food bill had to be subsidised with the luncheon vouchers my firm provided. I was always frightened of debt and would never consider taking anything on hire purchase in case I wasn’t in the position to pay the instalments. I got by, and over the years my advancing age and inflation played a great part in putting me in a better financial position; but I still wasn’t ‘flush’.

At my church there was a big appeal for a central

heating system. The church oversight had decided to take out the old-fashioned electric overhead heaters, which were a drain on the financial resources of the church, and inefficient as they burnt your head whilst your feet froze. They intended to install radiators to make the heating more cost effective. The minister challenged his church for individual members to pledge £200 over the course of a 6-month period. I can't remember how many sponsors he needed because it was quite a few years ago, but I do remember my heart being filled with a desire to be one of those people.

My fears concerning financial debt had never gone away, but I really wanted to prove my dedication to God and the church by this sacrifice. At the time I was working for a temporary employment agency and knew that any day I could have a phone call to say that there was no job for me the following week, so I prayed really hard and asked God to make sure that for the next 6 months I was kept in full time employment and then, in faith, I made my commitment to pay £200 to the church.

## Satisfaction

Every month after I had made this commitment I wrote out my cheque for the allotted amount – and I never missed one payment. At the end of the 6-month period I felt a tremendous sense of relief knowing that I was free from the debt I had put myself in, but I also felt a wonderful warm sense of

satisfaction knowing that I had sacrificed and given from a pure heart. It had cost me a great deal but it had been well worth it, because I had done it all myself.

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

## Truth hurts

God sorted me out and exposed me to myself. It hurt, but I was really grateful He kept me soft inside. The real danger is when we get hardened and refuse to face the truth; it's then that God can't help us, without something really drastic happening. And more often than not, He lets those people carry on believing lies and "hands them over to a reprobate mind".


The pure in heart can look at and thank God when somebody blesses them. The impure hide in shame.



My last full-time job – after years of pain  
God gave me a blessed working environment.



“Partners in crime” spending our stolen  
money in a mock pub at Belle Vue.



From "Blessed Are The Peacemakers"  
Challenge Issue 19

Peace is something everyone wants. From the militant antinuclear activists of the 'peace movement', to the ordinary man in the street, everybody would say they want peace on earth. And Christianity promises it - the angels announced it at Jesus' birth (Luke 2:14). Jesus is 'the Prince of Peace', and here in this beatitude we are called to be 'peacemakers'.

But Jesus didn't say "Blessed are the peaceful". This is not to do with having peace in ourselves. Being peaceful is a passive thing. A cemetery is the most peaceful place on earth - nearly every gravestone has the words 'rest in peace' engraved on it. But peacemaking is an active thing. Dead people cannot make peace. Psalm 34:14 instructs us to "seek peace and pursue it" - to actively chase after it.

# 15

## *Acquiring A Taste For Humble Pie*

Peace is a very desirable yet elusive thing. Because of my background peace never came easily to me as I never knew quite how to bring it about. The bible says that a kind answer turns away wrath, but I didn't know how to say kind things. Specific times in my life do stand out to me, however, as I recognised that God gave me wisdom and helped me to have a right attitude towards particular situations. People who have no peace are not happy people. At 16 years of age I left home and thought at last I could be happy because I'd have the peace I was craving, but it didn't take me long to realise that peace came from within, not from without.

Being Dad's pet as a child had its compensations, and the resentment and jealousy that this provoked in my older sister, brother and mother didn't cause me too much concern, until I reached the age of 6

when my younger sister was born and she stole all my father's affection. She was so innocent and sweet, and by this time I had become a cheeky little brat! No one had time for me at home any more. Dad regarded me as too outspoken. Mum, my brother and sister thought of me as being Dad's pet, spoilt, and a real pest. Consequently, I was out of the house as much as possible and did my utmost to be accepted into other people's families. The chores that I found so irksome to do when forced at home, were things that I delighted to do in other people's houses because I knew that my neatness and cleanliness would earn me praise and recognition. Unfortunately, the chip on my shoulder and resentment were growing every day and couldn't be missed in my attitude, and parents would often end up telling their children to keep away from me because they thought I would be a bad influence upon them.

## Lonely Walks

The treatment I received from family, friends, and teachers alike, hurt me tremendously as a youngster, and I'd spend hours going for lonely walks with the family dog to sit in woods or fields where I would cry away my frustration and pain. This is the way I always cried, I never used to let people know how their reactions or words affected me, for fear of them thinking I was weak. My exterior told everyone that I was brash, rebellious and hard, but inside I was really sore and wanted so much for someone to love

and understand me. The dog was a great comfort, she didn't utter a word, but she would sit beside me and lick away the tears that fell so freely down my face. When my crying was all done, and there were no tears left in me, I would put on my boxing gloves again telling myself that I didn't care, and go back home to battle once more. If my troubles had only been emotional that would have been bad enough, but Dad had been a champion boxer when he was in the army and the physical violence that occurred in our household far outweighed any verbal violence, as on these occasions the police had to intervene, and sometimes there would be a hospital admittance.

### Consent To Leave

Although I had run away from home or been thrown out of the house by my parents on numerous occasions, at the age of 16, when my parents finally gave their written consent for me to at last leave the nest, I'm sure that their relief was as great as mine. I had been going to my church since I was 9 years old, yet it was much later that I had become more involved in the activities. At 15 years of age I had become the church secretary, the church organist, and a member of the church music group that had just been formed. On hindsight I am so grateful that God prepared me to be on my own at the age of 16, because if I hadn't been so involved in these church activities, with my attitude, I don't know where I would have ended up. All I knew when I left home

was that I had a two-roomed furnished flat and more freedom than I had ever known before. I was the only one ruling my life at this point in time, there were no parents or teachers telling me what to do.

On the one hand I felt incredibly excited at the prospect of all this freedom, yet on the other hand I felt very vulnerable indeed. I had suddenly been landed with responsibilities that I had never known anything about – paying the rent, and bills etc., but there and then I made my decision that even if I starved I would never go back home.

## The Nightmares Begin

For a few months everything seemed to be going well. Gradually I began to let down my defences and relax a little, and this probably allowed my subconscious to take over, for I began to be troubled with nightmares. Night after night I would wake up screaming, sobbing and sweating, reliving in my dreams some of the traumatic experiences I had passed through. These nightmares were very painful and horrible, and I prayed earnestly that God would set me free from them, but week after week they continued until I got to the stage where I was really frightened to go to bed at night. My appearance was beginning to suffer because of my sleepless nights. I had huge bags under my eyes. At the end of one music practice evening Maurice, who was then the leader of the music group, asked me why I was looking so unwell.

I had never shared my home life with any member of the church for two reasons; 1) I didn't think they'd believe me, 2) I thought that they would probably think that I had brought everything upon myself. So I kept quiet and had become very suspicious, thinking that every family in the church was the same as ours.

For 18 months prior to these nightmares I had spent a lot of time at the office in the minister's house as I was the church secretary, and he had done his utmost to make me feel at home. After eating the Saturday midday meal with his family I would go down into the office to do my work, but it wouldn't be long before the minister and I would be deep in conversation and he would spend hours explaining scriptures to me and talking about God in such a way that sometimes my heart felt as though it would burst with gratitude for the fact that God had allowed me to become a Christian.

## A Real Christian

Those times of fellowship and communion that I shared with him boosted me so much that it made all my past and present difficulties insignificant. I knew that he was a real Christian; his lifestyle and family life were so different from my own, and I desperately wanted the relationship that he had with Jesus Christ for myself.

As Maurice was the minister's son, when he asked me why I was looking so unwell, I felt less inhibited to share my problems with him because I thought he

would be something like his father and would show me sympathy and understanding. But I was sadly mistaken. After sharing my nightmares with him, Maurice looked me straight in the face and quoted a verse of scripture which says, “If any man says he loves God and hates his brother that man is a liar” (1 John 4:20).

He went on to say that it was obvious from my attitude that I had a real problem with hatred and bitterness, and if I wanted to be a Christian then I had to make a decision to forgive; after all, that is what Christianity is – “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Matthew 6:12).

## I Stormed Out

I can't convey on paper the angry feelings that I had towards Maurice at that particular point in time. I felt so frustrated, because I knew he had no conception of the sort of background I'd come from. I had only been with his family for a short time but I knew they behaved in a completely different way to my own so it was impossible for him to understand where I was coming from. In a rage I stormed out of the church, and, feeling totally justified about my attitude, I vowed that I would not forgive my parents until I was asked by them for forgiveness!

Until this point I don't think I'd ever truly realised the extent of my hatred and bitterness towards my mother and father. There seemed to be a fire

burning within me that could not be quenched. The nightmares continued, the burning sensation continued, I had no peace because I knew what Maurice had said was the truth and God would not let me get away from the fact that I had a responsibility towards my own salvation.

I remember sitting down one night in my flat and rationally thinking over the situation. I had left home some time ago. When I was still living with my parents my sarcasm and vicious actions used to hurt them and I received a good deal of satisfaction from this fact. But now that I had left home any murderous thoughts and feelings that I had towards my parents were no longer affecting them. My hatred and bitterness was hurting no one but me. I despised the idea of eating 'humble pie', but I really did want to be a real Christian. In my short lifetime I'd witnessed the genuine and the false, and I knew which I wanted. It took a great deal of effort, but I eventually prayed that God would heal me, that He would take away the hatred. At this point I couldn't ask for my hatred to be replaced with love, but I did ask that God would do a miracle and change me.

## Understanding

The nightmares stopped immediately, and each night I would pray through gritted teeth that God would heal me, take away the hatred and change my attitude towards them. God had a lot to do to soften me up inside. I only understood situations from my

point of view. God had to show me that other people had backgrounds too – everyone has a story to tell.

He began to remind me of experiences my parents had been forced to pass through whilst growing up. At the time I'd ignored what my parents had to say, thinking that was their problem and nothing to do with me. But now that God was bringing it to my mind I realised that everyone is a product of their environment, and God gradually gave me understanding for my parents. From the bottom of my heart I finally forgave them for the things that had gone on in my past and my prayers began to change. I no longer asked God to take away the hatred and change my attitude towards them, my prayer changed to – “Lord, please bless my parents and show them the kindness that You've shown to me”.

The peace returned

When I began to pray this prayer in all honesty I really did feel the peace of God flowing in my heart. The years since I was 16 have proved what a thorough work God did in my heart, because even though there was no communication from my parents to me I could still pray in all sincerity that God would bless them and show them the kindness He'd shown me.

During my time of estrangement from my parents I heard a sermon preached by my pastor which helped me to come to terms with the situation. He was preaching about prophecy. He said that the

wonderful thing about prophecy was that it kept on being fulfilled over and over again. It wasn't necessarily just for one specific period. He talked about Jacob & Esau and how the prophecy his mother received when she was pregnant told of the struggle going on in her womb. But the struggle didn't end there, the prophecy was fulfilled over and over again during their lives. He said that our lives were prophetic. He looked at other people in the Bible as illustrations and it was clear that what he said was true.

### A prophetic birth

Encouraged by what I had heard I took a look at my own life. I remembered my parents telling me that the umbilical cord had been wrapped around my neck and the midwives had cut the cord to prevent me being strangled whilst being born. A natural birth would have killed me, someone had to intervene. But the problem was that when I was cut free, my Mothers' womb was accidentally cut also, which caused her unbelievable complications. Her womb turned septic, she suffered a prolapse and fibroids. She underwent 2 major operations to no avail and was under specialists at the hospital who could do nothing for her. My Mother was in constant pain and her womb was unable to hold pregnancies – on one occasion a partially formed baby actually dropped from her body. She put it in a little pot and showed it to her doctor. When I was 6 years old Mother

did manage to have another child who was born prematurely, but she was in so much pain during the pregnancy and birth that she feared having more children. When I was 9 years old Mum was again pregnant with her 5th child. She was terrified of what was to come but couldn't do anything about it. It was during this pregnancy that God stepped into her life. She and Dad became Christians and God miraculously healed my Mothers' body. She gave birth to my youngest sister, Faith, who weighed in at 9 lbs 3 ozs and was perfect in every way.

### Spiritual healing needed

I started wondering what this could mean for me prophetically. It was necessary for me to be cut free from my Mother at birth, otherwise she would have unintentionally killed me. My birth had forced Mum to endure years of physical pain. Indeed it was only when God healed her that she could lead a normal life again. Mum had always held a grudge against me for the pain she suffered – I had been the cause, and she resented me for it. We had never got on well together, there was a constant clash between us. But during that service I began to realise that as God had done a miracle and healed Mum physically, so He would need to do a miracle to heal her spiritually towards me. She couldn't do anything about her condition of heart towards me, the hurt had gone too deep. God had to do a miracle.

Even though I could clearly see that this situation

was completely beyond my control, it gave me great encouragement to know what I was to pray for. I began asking for God to do a miracle to soften Mum's heart, and did everything I could to bridge the gap between us. I did things in secret, I did things openly, but nothing changed her attitude. She was as hard as nails. Ministers tried to intervene to get us together, but she would have none of it saying emphatically that she did not want reconciliation.

I gave birth to my first child on 10th November 1991. We had photos taken of Maurice and myself with Nathan just 8 days after his birth, and decided to send her a copy of the photo with a Christmas Card. Surely the sight of her little grandchild would soften her ... I obviously thought wrong. Within a couple of weeks the card and photo were returned, the envelope stating for all to see that they no longer knew me.

### A surprise visit

When Nathan was 2 years old I decided to drop in on my parents unannounced. I rang the door bell then hid out of sight of the spy hole in the front door so that my parents couldn't see me. The door opened and I popped my head out saying, "Hi!" and beamed a great big smile at my Mother. She was shocked to see me, to say the least, and asked what I wanted. I said I'd called to see her and asked to be invited in. "Well, you'd better come in then, there's no point arguing on the doorstep for all

the neighbours to see!” They were very curt with me, but I was so friendly and exuberant that I just pushed to one side all their barriers and bamboozled my way back into their lives. Maurice and Nathan were in the car outside so I brought them in. Dad immediately made a fuss of Nathan as he adores kids and everything seemed OK.

Let go and let God

But it didn't last long. With every visit I made there were always sarcastic references to the pastor (who was now my father-in-law) which I found unbelievably hard to stomach. I realised that the 'reconciliation' was completely one-sided – it had all come from me, I had forced Mum into this situation and she wasn't comfortable. I decided to leave well alone and allow God to bring about the miracle in His own way, then it would be real.

I continued to pray, fast, cry, anything to attract God's attention to what was going on in my family and begged Him to do something about it. Eventually God did speak to me and told me He couldn't heal someone who didn't want to be healed, but He could raise the dead. At last I understood. I had to treat Mum and Dad as though they were dead – like Lazarus or Jairus' daughter in the Bible – because then God could do a miracle by bringing them back to life, and He alone would get the glory, not man because they had interfered. From that moment onwards I stopped all my communication, no birthday

or Christmas Cards, no visits, nothing. And I waited 7 years for the miracle but when it happened it was so simple and easy.

## The miracle

Myra, my oldest sister, paid Mum and Dad a visit from Australia, and whilst in the country came to see me. I had a couple of apple trees in the garden and knew Mum enjoyed baking so asked Myra to take some apples for her. The next time Myra came to see me she brought some choc-ices which apparently Mum couldn't fit into her freezer. When Myra had gone back to Mums' house I rang my parents to thank them. Dad answered the phone and after saying a quick "Thank you for the choc-ices", I put the phone down. Myra went home to Australia and a couple of days later I had a phone call from Mum. She wanted to thank me for the apples I had left on her doorstep. But I hadn't left any apples on her doorstep! I tried to tell her the truth but before I could finish she asked which buses she would have to get on to reach my house if she wanted to come round. I was shocked! "Don't be daft, if you wanted to come round I'd pick you up in my car!" "Well, which day would be most convenient?" she asked. My head was spinning – she had visited me once, at most twice, since I left home at the age of 16 and at the time of this telephone call I was 48 years old. I arranged a time to collect her and Dad and put the phone down in a daze.

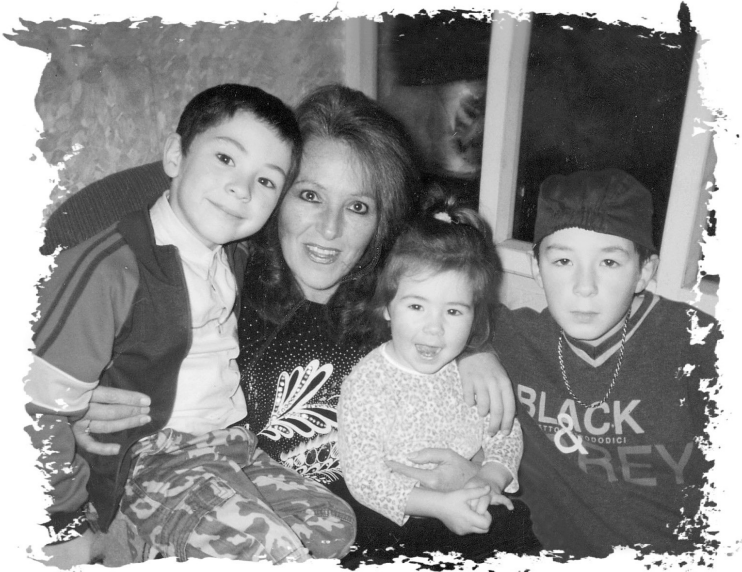
Sure enough I brought them to my home and it was as though they had never been out of my life – except that there was a complete attitude change. My Mother was the one in control this time, she had made the decision to make up with me and was not being forced. God did an incredible miracle. Maurice showed Mum and Dad around our offices, and shared our work and vision with them. They were so impressed that the next time they saw us they gave us a gift of £1000 each ... I didn't even know they had £100 between them! Mum began going to house meetings with Maurice and sometimes even came into our offices to help getting the 'Challenge' bulletins out for us. From being totally antagonistic, they became allies and blessed us.

### A 39-year wait

It took many years for the miracle to happen, I was 9 years old when God healed my Mother physically, but I was 48 years old when God healed her spiritually. It took 39 years for me to see His promise come to pass. We may not always be able to have peace with men, but as Christians we have no excuse for not having peace with God, and bitterness and unforgiveness are two of the major hindrances to true peace in our hearts.



My Dad and Mum - reconciled at last in 2000



Unbelievably blessed – with Izaac, Tamar and Nathan



From "Persecution For Righteousness Sake"  
Challenge Issue 20

All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12). This is one of those 'promises' which we usually leave out of the 'promise box'! But we have to come to terms with it.

Joseph was initially persecuted because he was his father's favourite, and because of his God-given dreams. His own brothers hated him so much that they threw him in a pit and would have left him to die, had not Judah persuaded them to sell him into slavery instead.

David was persecuted and hunted down by Saul. Saul had no false accusations to bring against David, only the fact that God had chosen him. When David came upon Saul secretly in the wilderness and refused to kill him, Saul confessed to David 'Thou art more righteous than I ...' (1 Samuel 24:17). Yet Saul continued to persecute David and try to kill him.

Enduring persecution is part of our calling and commission. Jesus sent his disciples out 'as sheep in the midst of wolves' (Matthew 10:16), and told them they would be 'delivered up', 'scourged', 'persecuted', 'hated of all men' (Matthew 10:17-23). In other words, persecution is part of God's will, and we're always blessed when we're in God's will.

## 16

# *‘The Servant Is Not Greater Than His Lord’*

I ran to my bedroom hoping to escape the terrible battering I probably deserved. I was terrified of Dad’s anger yet I seemed incapable of saying or doing the right things. He forced open the door which I had locked against his entry and in sheer panic I picked up the standard lamp and began to smash all my bedroom windows with the base of it, screaming for help and for somebody to call the police. The adrenaline was rushing through me and I knew as I lashed out wildly that something outside my control had taken over me. Dad must have seen it too because it frightened him and he backed out of the room telling my mother that I had gone mad.

As they retreated downstairs I continued smashing the windows and screaming at the top of my voice until I had no more strength left. I felt limp and exhausted as I slumped onto my bed and words

came into my mind as God began to speak sense to me, "You won't remain a Christian if you stay in this house, you've got to get away. If you don't, you'll go insane." For a few years now I'd been running away from home and staying with various families who'd sheltered me, only to be brought back again by the police at my parents' request. There were times also when my parents had thrown me out but then had second thoughts and called the police to bring me home. There and then as I sat slumped on my bed, I prayed that, even though I was under age, God would make a way for me to leave that house. God must have heard my prayer, for that's exactly what He did ...

### God begins to work

My oldest sister, who had emigrated to Australia a few years after her marriage, had written to my parents on numerous occasions inviting them to do the same as she had done and start their lives again in another country. My parents had thought about and dropped this idea every time, but now it took root and they actually went to the emigration authorities to sort out the matter. Their passage out would have been easy if I hadn't been such a hindrance. I adamantly refused to go with them. For the past year I had been putting down roots in my church where I had become organist, secretary and a member of the music group. After all these years of being rejected and unwanted, I at last felt useful,

and I think I would have walked over hot coals to keep the friendship and trust that was offered by the minister. The emigration authorities told my parents that they would either have to drop the idea of going to Australia for the time being or find a guardian for me. They chose the latter option, and my minister signed all the necessary paperwork to become my legal guardian. My parents could now relinquish all responsibility for me and at last I could leave home with their consent.

### New loyalty

Everything was ‘hunky dory’, until something happened which stopped my parents pursuing their emigration plans. My mother seemed terribly resentful of the fact that the most godly Christian she knew had become my ally. From her point of view I can see how unbelievable it must have been that anyone would take on such a self-opinionated, arrogant, rebellious, troublesome person as myself. But the confidence and trust the minister put into me brought out loyalty and devotion which I never dreamed I could give. He knew I was very lonely and had no friends, and would include me at every opportunity in his family circle. He confessed to me that, even though my parents hadn’t emigrated, he’d taken his commitment very seriously and prayed for me every day as he did for each member of his own immediate family. I partook in the family worship, and enjoyed the special treat of Saturday night

supper when all his family, married and unmarried, would meet for laughter or serious conversation with real Mancunian shop bought fish & chips wrapped up in newspaper.

## Valuable lessons

As my relationship with his two single daughters developed we began to holiday together, sometimes making these events special times of seeking God for spiritual growth. The minister’s daughter Lis, who was my own age, taught me some very valuable lessons. After graduating from university, she went to Germany to teach English to children in German schools. Whilst living over there she made many friends and did lots of things with her new found freedom.

On her return she came back to live with her parents – which I thought was very strange. I had expected her to rent a flat somewhere as I had done. I knew she’d enjoyed her stay in Germany because of the stories she’d told us, so I concluded she must be quite soft and unable to cope for any length of time on her own and needed the support of her family around her. I remember sharing my thoughts with her one day and she was quite shocked. She put me straight there and then by saying that I was totally wrong. The reason for her returning home was that she enjoyed living with her parents! Lis proved this statement over and over again in the things I personally witnessed her doing.

Lis’s mother gradually became incapable of running the household due to osteo-arthritis, so after a family discussion it was decided that Chris, the youngest daughter, would stay at home to look after her mother and do the housework and Lis would go to work and be the breadwinner (as the minister only had a very small income from the church).

Lis had some splendid qualifications which enabled her to get high-ranking positions. Each month she would lay her salary before the family at their ‘business meeting’, and after paying bills, food, etc., they would equally divide what remained amongst themselves as spends. It might only be £2 each week, but I know that her parents, in all their married life, had never before had money they could call their own.

### An unbelievable family

This family was unbelievable. I spent more and more time with them, and their attitudes and lifestyle made such a deep impression upon me that they began to rub off, and my character gradually changed.

I became less hard and aggressive, more willing and adaptable, and because the minister could talk of nothing but God, my desire for holy things grew beyond all recognition. I had always had a good singing voice, now God began to anoint it and I had reports of people being filled with the Holy Ghost or healed as I sang.

The family I was born into was so different from the Barratts’ household. We had an embarrassing track record for misconduct. My oldest sister and brother had marital problems and had been divorced, my younger sister had given birth to illegitimate children, and I had a half-sister living a few blocks away whom my father told me about after his conversion! I wasn’t bothered that people expected the worst of me – after all, I had come from this stock. But the scandal which surrounded me was rumoured by my own mother who was telling everybody that the minister had always coveted me for his family, and I was now living with ‘another woman’s husband’, as a couple from the church were supporting me so that I could voluntarily work for the church on a full-time basis!

## Failed efforts

It was only a few months after I had left home that God began to deal with my attitude towards my parents, and as I began to soften up towards them I also tried to build up some sort of relationship. I visited them on Sunday afternoons, yet no matter how hard I tried to hold my tongue we always ended up rowing. My mother was unreasonably jealous of the bond that had been forged between the Barratts and myself and was constantly taunting me, saying that she (my mother) wasn’t good enough, and that I now had a new Mum and Dad. I was working hard at this relationship with my parents and made

great efforts to change my attitude, but this also incensed her and she would sneeringly call me 'a little Barratt'. The only true friends I had in the world at that point *were* the Barratts, and Mum's jealousy was just pushing me further towards them.

### Sad situation

Mum could have been so proud of me. I knew many people my own age who had left home and just used it as an excuse to go completely wild. Many of my school friends had ended up in trouble with pregnancy, drugs and crime. The world was an exciting place offering many temptations. I was a young, good-looking girl, and had no shortage of attention from worldly men who were willing to wine and dine me just to come back to my flat at night.

It wasn't only my parents who criticised my relationship with the Barratts, I got plenty of criticism at work. It didn't take long for bosses to find out what I did in my spare time, and when I refused their advances they would lecherously say, "The minister must be onto a good thing!" The fact that I kept stressing I didn't have a boyfriend and wasn't looking for a relationship, seemed to make people think I was either a lesbian or had emotional hang-ups. It used to frustrate me no end. I can't tell you how difficult it is to live a moral life in such a permissive age. Too much television seems to have made people expect the worst of everybody, and they were always looking for the hidden dark secret

that lay buried in me. Nobody believed me when I said I didn't want to get married and yet that was the truth. I believed with all my heart that God had given me a ministry, and I wanted Him to have every opportunity to fulfil that destiny in my life.


### Changed name - changed life

When I was 30 God told me to do a very strange and difficult thing. He told me to change my name. I held back for 2 years knowing that this would cause terrible misunderstanding and criticism, during which time I tried all the more to make peace with my family, but to no avail. At 32 years of age I changed my surname to 'Barratt'. I'd been 16 when I'd left home and for 16 years I had been part of this other family, and God told me it was time to legally recognise something that He had done spiritually. This action caused problems as expected, but God had already dealt with me and taken away the hatred and bitterness I once had towards my parents. I knew that what I was doing was not out of spite but in obedience to God. The stronger I felt the call of God, obeyed His specific instructions to me and changed my lifestyle to live holy and separate, the more people misunderstood and persecuted me. I'm not saying I always felt blessed when this happened, but I know that I have the kingdom of heaven to look forward to, where all tears will be wiped away and we'll receive all the comfort and love we are often denied down here.

Vacations  
seeking God  
together with  
Maurice's  
sisters Chris  
(left) and Lis



Working together in Sharon church  
with Maurice and his father Bill Barratt



From "False Accusation"  
Challenge Issue 21

This is a progression from the previous beatitude. To be persecuted because you are righteous, is one thing; but to bear false accusation and be accused of doing immoral, deceitful or ungodly things is quite another, because it attacks your reputation. It slanders both and you and God. There is a tremendous temptation to defend yourself.

This is persecution for Jesus' sake, but it is our reputation that suffers. If we are tempted to defend our reputation and repudiate the false charges that come against us, it proves one thing - that we haven't yet given God our reputation. Once we have given God our reputation, it no longer matters what people think of us; that's in God's hands. It's up to Him whether He defends us or not. And scripture shows us that sometimes He does defend, and sometimes He doesn't. Hebrews 11, the 'faith chapter', lists all the people who had great vindication's and deliverance's from God - Daniel in the lions' den, and so on. But it also lists the people who "were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection." That is faith indeed! If they could do it, so can we, for we have the same resources - the life of Christ within us.

# 17

## *God Sees All*

At 30 years of age God told me to do a 7-day water fast. I hired a holiday home in Matlock to do the fast away from temptation, and the week after I returned home God spoke to me and told me to stop all the activities I was doing in the church. I recognised God's voice, although it seemed a very unusual instruction, but to emphasise it He allowed me to get a frozen shoulder which physically put me out of action for about 2 months. I struggled with all my might to play the organ for the final service of the year on December 31st, but during the interval when we had refreshments, I asked the music student who had been standing in for me for the midweek meetings to take over for the 'Watch-night Service' to herald in the New Year – and that was the last time I played in my church as the organist.

People didn't understand that I was obeying God – they assumed I was backsliding. Those who looked on presumed that I had been removed from the platform

because I was under church discipline for some misdemeanour, and so they treated me accordingly. The pressure from attack became so strong that I finally threw the towel in, and prayed, “Lord, if I really do have a ministry, then You personally will have to bring it about because I’m just not strong enough to hold on any more”. I left the church, and the people who were supporting me in their home. I got a job and a flat and tried to begin life again. After making that one decision to throw the towel in I felt that I had lost everything, family, friends, church, and I entered into the darkest period that I’d ever experienced in my life. I was depressed, I didn’t know what I was any more – but couldn’t stand to be called a ‘Christian’ for fear of being associated with those who’d damaged me so wantonly.

### A strange vision

I began to think about the vision God had given me just before I’d gone on my 7-day water fast in Matlock. I had seen a woman inside a little dark hut which had just one small window apart from the door. She sat in the gloom huddled up in a dark hooded cloak which not only covered her body but also her face. She was afraid to be seen because she was ugly, she had once been very beautiful but now she was covered in boils from head to toe and was afraid to be seen. From a little crack in the window she looked outside the hut and saw, in the golden sunshine, a peacock with its tail fanned out behind.

It strutted around displaying all its colourful ‘eyes’ and she admired the bird for its wonderful beauty. But God spoke to her in the silence of the dark hut and told her not to admire the bird, for it was a very proud bird, very proud and haughty. And even though it had so many ‘eyes’ in its tail, none of them could see; it was as blind as a bat. As far as sense was concerned, this creature had a bird’s brain and couldn’t think or feel – it just acted on instinct. But not so with the woman, for God was trying her as He had tried Job, and when He had tried her she too would come forth as pure gold and would have understanding and compassion that the bird would never be capable of having – because she herself had experienced deep trials.

### The bitterness returns

I knew when God gave me this vision that He was forewarning me of some terrible ordeal I would have to pass through, but I never envisaged it could be so bad. It was rumoured by some that I had been excommunicated from the church, and others even spread rumours that I had left to have an abortion! I was disgusted at the filth which some ‘Christians’ not only thought, but gossiped about in church, and the hatred and bitterness that God had once delivered me from now began to return, only this time it was aimed at the church. I had served on the church platform for 15 years and it seemed as though the only one who cared was the minister, who

had broken down in tears before me when I told him of my decision to leave. I found prayer impossible because all that was in my mind was the hurt I was suffering.

### I needed fellowship

After a while I began to go to church again but this time it was completely different. I needed fellowship so much. I couldn't seem to find God on my own. I was just a member of the congregation, taking instead of giving, and gradually God began to rebuild my life. After attending this new church for about a year, the minister mentioned to me that somebody had told him I was a singer, and he asked if I would like to sing at the weekend service. After that meeting he asked if I would like to stage a concert in his church. To be honest I thought that my ministry had ended, but now a ray of hope began to shine in my heart as I thought (just like Joseph in the prison) that maybe God could be remembering me.

Maurice and I worked on the programme and had tickets printed which we distributed to lots of old friends, who in turn passed them on. It so happened that one of these tickets made its way into my parents' hands and they immediately telephoned my former minister demanding that the minister of my new church should be informed that I had been excommunicated from my former church. After informing them clearly of the facts, it seemed that my parents not only wanted to humiliate me, but

also crush and destroy me completely.

Well, the show went on, and from my very first song, which was “O how I love thy law” from Psalm 119, I experienced something brand new as I sang. I didn’t have any facilities for lighting effects, but during my opening song the congregation seemed to fade into darkness and a light beamed down on me from the ceiling. I looked into the light and saw past the ceiling, past the roof, through the sky and right into heaven where I could see God sitting on His throne listening to my every word.

## Engrossed in God

I don’t remember anything else about the concert other than I was absolutely engrossed in God. During those past 3 years of being totally stripped of my ministry, the humiliating process that I had travelled through had wrought incredible changes in my heart which I hadn’t been aware were taking place. I’d been in the limelight far too long, and God in His mercy had needed to knock me from my pedestal to make me realise that I wasn’t His gift to the church, He himself was His gift to the church, and His intention for anyone who stands on the platform is that they should be a mediator between Himself and the congregation, so that God can communicate with His people.

I now realised what a tremendous privilege it was to stand on the platform and be called to the ministry, and after that concert I recall saying to

Maurice that now I understood what Jesus meant when He said, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me” (John 4:34).

## A new Beginning

God had forewarned me in the vision that He was going to try me as He had tried Job, but now He began to bless me also as He had blessed Job and He gave me back not only what I had lost, but far more than I had dreamed of. My voice took on a whole new dimension: from being very sweet and pure it now became very strong and powerful and carried a far greater conviction. God then told Maurice and I to ‘get back in the ministry’, and together with his father we formed ‘Barratt Ministries’ and began to travel once again. Our ministry was well accepted and we had far more invitations than we could cope with. In one year I recall being in 8 different countries and had difficulty remembering not only which church, but which country I was in!

## The rewards of persecution

Considering the fact that people had so strongly resisted our ministry together, I was amazed to see that God had taken us as far as the USA, Barbados, the Canary Islands, Holland, Poland, Germany, Belgium, Scotland and Wales, quite apart from all the work we did in England. In some of these countries we also had radio and television interviews and were invited to speak in prisons and at Full Gospel Business

Men's Dinners. A few years after I'd left my former church someone in authority took it upon himself to make a full investigation of all the allegations and accusations made against me. After a few weeks of research he brought a written statement in which he said that not only had he found the rumours to be malicious gossip but also downright lies! I felt quite let down when he didn't take his findings to the congregation, but then this was yet another trial I had to pass through. I know one thing though, God sees all. Persecution may not bring its reward down here, but there's one thing we can be sure of, and that is that God will certainly make it up to us in His future kingdom, and the reward there will be eternal ... I know which I prefer, but that's because I really do believe in 'life' after death. Your attitude down here proves whether you do too!

