

IT'S PAST MIDNIGHT!

WHAT HAPPENED
TO THE PROMISE?



JOANNA BARRATT



It's Past Midnight!

What happened to the promise?

Copyright Disclaimer

You are free to quote, copy, and distribute the material in this book. Barratt Ministries operates a non-copyright policy on all original material.

It's Past Midnight! by **Joanna Barratt**

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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

ISBN: 978-1-904592-90-7

First Published & Printed: July 2013

by **Barratt Ministries Publications**

114 Daisy Bank Road, Victoria Park,
Manchester M14 5QH, UK.

E-mail: info@barrattministries.org.uk

Web: www.barrattministries.org.uk

It's Past Midnight!

What happened to the promise?

by

JOANNA BARRATT



BARRATT MINISTRIES PUBLICATIONS
Manchester M14 5QH, England

Contents

	Introduction	7
1	The Prayer of Faith	13
2	Natural Faith	19
3	Fruit of Faith	29
4	Gift of Faith	33
5	Grace	37
6	Facing Truth About Ourselves	47
7	Bringing Trouble on Ourselves	55
8	Believing What God Says	67
9	Which Faith Is Jesus Looking For?	75
10	Where Do We Start?	85
11	Adversity – Perfect Tool To Prove Us	93
12	Lazarus Is Not Dead	101
13	Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled	107
14	Lazarus Is Dead	115
15	Can I Trust My Feelings?	125
16	It's Past Midnight!	131
17	The Woman Who Got It Right	139
18	What's 'On Time'?	151
19	The Good Samaritan	159
20	Zacharias	167
21	Jairus	173
22	Love Is Always Late	185
23	Can I Make Amends?	193
	Epilouge	205

Love will always lose the prize, according to the law,
because love is always beaten in the race. Only evil
and vice can make the records. Love is always late.

Richard Wurmbrand



Introduction

For some time now it has disturbed me to see Christians flounder in the area of believing what God has said to them. Circumstances seem to make the difference between whether they believe or dismiss the promises they have been given.

From the age of 15 God graciously allowed me to become deeply involved with the ministry team of my church with whom I met regularly for prayer. During these prayer sessions, lead by the pastor, God would very regularly speak through visions and prophetic words as he directed and instructed us. I was so enthused and excited that I would eagerly write them all up in journals, noting the dates when he had spoken, then wait to see them fulfilled. If God had spoken, then this, surely, was something to be taken very seriously!

Without fear of contradiction I can emphatically say that my pastor was a real man of God. He gave me a fantastic foundation, teaching me by both word of mouth and example. It was a tremendous privilege to serve under him in the ministry and,

God knows, I trusted him so much I would have followed him anywhere. The ministry team went through many phases where people joined, people left, until eventually there was only Maurice and myself working with the pastor.

Blessing and a curse

One particular vision I vividly remember was actually acted out when I called on the pastor at his home for prayer. There were only 4 of us praying together, the pastor and his wife, Maurice (his son), and me. During our prayer session the pastor went upstairs, and I just presumed he had gone to the bathroom. When he came back into the room he was holding one of his waist-belts which, after buckling on the loosest hole, he placed on the floor and stood inside. He looked over to Maurice and told him to stand with him inside the circle of the belt, so Maurice obeyed and they stood together. To my surprise he then looked at me and told me to join them.

I don't suppose I need to say this, but there was not very much room inside that belt for me. In fact, the only way I could stand inside the belt was to hold on tightly to both the pastor and Maurice, who likewise clung on to each other, so that we wouldn't all fall out. It was quite embarrassing to be so close to these 2 men, especially in front of the pastor's wife! But then the pastor spoke ..."Thus saith the Lord, I have called you to work together for the glory of God, and you will be joined together so closely that there will be much criticism and confusion from

those looking on as they will not understand the relationship. Indeed you will be so close that you, yourselves, will feel uncomfortable and embarrassed at times. Don't fear the faces or tongues of men, for this is the Lord's doing."

After our prayer session we discussed what had just taken place and felt confident that we would face whatever situation God placed us in without flinching. We knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that God was doing something very peculiar with us. Obviously, we couldn't share what God had said with anyone in the church, we were only relieved that the pastor's wife had been there to witness it for herself. This was only one of many visions saying the same sort of thing, but it was so visual that we caught a glimpse of the impact our spiritual relationship was going to have.

Couldn't take the pressure

We were a close team and worked well together both in the church and abroad. Maurice and I were in constant communication with the pastor and supported him to the best of our ability. Sadly, years later, after much criticism and misunderstanding from even the very elders of the church, the pastor said that something needed to be done to pacify them. The fact that I was a single woman working closely with 2 men was causing far too many problems. Appearances were not good – and, never mind what God says, we need to keep up with appearances, don't we?

By this time I was so weary of constantly hearing about all the problems and calls for resolve that I finally said I had the answer ... I would disappear! From this point onward I now had no pastor, I would leave the church, go miles away where nobody could connect us all up, and Maurice and his father could serve God together without me, as from all accounts it seemed as though I was the hindrance.

To be honest, I could take any amount of pressure the church elders and members put upon me. I had heard clearly the voice of God warning us of the consequences our working together would bring. What got me, however, was the fact that my pastor, the very one who had given the many visions and stood inside the belt with us, was asking for help out of this situation. If he couldn't believe what God had said to us all ... what chance did I have? I looked up to him for all my spiritual guidance.

Handling disappointment

This incident caused me to lose faith in the very man I had trusted. He had taught me everything I knew about God and the power of the Holy Spirit. This had been my life. But now I found that he didn't believe his own visions enough to fight for them. I wasn't prepared to play games with spiritual gifts. If it wasn't real, then I didn't want it.

It took me years to get over this disappointment. Incidents like this can cause terrible damage to vulnerable believers. Although I left the church, and the area, God brought me back again to work with

Maurice, picking up where we had left off. But all too often people who have been through these times of testing fall into despair and, because of the pressure, doubt the initial instruction or promise.

In this book I have tried to show that with every promise of God there will be times of trial and testing, we never get anything from God without proving we are worthy of it.

So, what makes us worthy? Well, you will have to read on to find out.



1

The Prayer of Faith

And Jesus spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge says. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. **Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?**

Luke 18:1-7

In this particular parable Jesus is telling people very clearly that they need to continually pray ... but what specifically are they meant to be praying for? I have heard many interpretations of this passage, but to be honest, when I read it for myself I find that there is perhaps a different principle which Jesus is trying to get across to us.

He makes it clear that the judge in question was totally unworthy of his position for he had no compassion whatsoever, and had a total disregard for people. So, when this poor widow woman came with her request he was unwilling to even listen, let alone take up her cause. The problem for him was that she just wouldn't go away, but continually knocked on his door requesting that he would avenge her of her enemies, calling for justice to be done.

He was a very reluctant champion, and withstood her for a while; but she troubled him. She gave him no rest. She caused him distress, and her relentless persistence began to weary him. Indeed, it was only because she was so annoying that he eventually took action.

Then Jesus said, Hear what the unjust judge said:

Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming **she weary me...**

Is this really how we want God to respond when we make our continual requests? Do we want to persistently nag him until he gives in and we get our own way? Is there any joy in receiving our answers

when all we have done is weary God so much that he'll do anything just to get us off his back? I think not.

We have the promise from Jesus that God most certainly will avenge his own elect, which cry unto him day and night, though he bears long with them – yes, they get on his nerves with their persistent nagging – but he will answer them speedily!

Nevertheless ...When the son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

Nevertheless

We are told to pray, and not to faint, but does that mean we are expected to continually ask for the same thing over and over again until we receive it? How would we react if our children were to adopt that attitude with us? Many parents get so frustrated with their children that, even against their better judgement, they give in to their whims just for the sake of peace. I have often been in shops and seen embarrassed mothers with screaming infants in tow who throw tantrums and make a terrible scene because they have been refused a toy, a bar of chocolate, or some other such thing. Instead of enforcing disciplining, the manipulated mother often gives in to the demands of the child just so that it will shut up – not unlike the unjust judge!

In this parable the word '**nevertheless**' is of paramount importance. It means ... regardless of all that happens, whether you get the answer you are

looking for or not, will somebody out there please just put their trust in me?

When Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus after he had risen from the dead, beginning at Moses and continuing through the various prophets, he expounded unto them all the scriptures concerning himself, and said unto them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." These were the very men with whom he had walked and shared the secrets of the kingdom with for the past 3 years. They had been on the mission field with him and not only witnessed all the miracles he ever did, but had actually experienced miraculous answers to their own personal prayers when they were sent out by Jesus to preach in the same way.

All Jesus will be looking for when he returns to this earth are people who have the unswerving faith to believe that God will do what he has said he would do no matter how long it takes. Jesus scoured the earth during his first visit looking for fruit but continually came up against unbelief. A Messiah had been prophesied; signs to herald his coming had been given; John the Baptist had come in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord; but very few were anticipating his arrival.

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

Hebrews 11:6

So, what is faith?

Put very simply there are different types of faith – Natural Faith; Fruit of Faith; Gift of Faith. They manifest at various times depending upon the circumstances. In the next few chapters I will endeavour to explain simply the difference between these different types of faith so that you will be clear about which faith Jesus is looking for.



2

Natural Faith

When I have explained what the differences are between the 3 types of faith it will be very easy for you to identify which particular one is being exercised at any given moment.

Let us begin by looking at this first type, Natural Faith.

Everyone has it

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Romans 12:3

Every person on the planet has been born with a measure of natural faith. In fact, it is so natural that we very rarely think of categorising it as faith for it is constantly in operation. From birth until being just a few months old every child is totally dependent on others for their every need as they are utterly vulnerable and helpless. They are at the mercy of other people for the very food and drink that goes into their mouths to keep them alive, and cleaning up their mess. Every single one of us, whether we remember or not, have lived through this experience of being incapable.

Often, whilst watching people in Africa, my heart has been in my mouth as I've observed young children, aged around 6 or 7 years old, carrying smaller children in their arms, or even having them strapped to their backs, thinking to myself that if they dropped them...? Or, if the child carrying that little one slipped and fell...? It worried me as an onlooker, yet the child being carried had been content with no fear at all. They just had this natural faith which blinded them to any foresight of calamity.

Where did it go?

Growing older changes us considerably as we gain wisdom from life experiences. We learn, often through painful lessons, that not everyone can be trusted and we begin to take stock of what could happen if things don't go according to plan, but we still maintain an enormous amount of our natural

faith, because it would be impossible for us to live normal lives if we didn't have it.

For instance: When I get into my car I don't think for one moment that a bomb has been planted beneath it and it will blow up when I turn on the ignition key ... and yet, in rare circumstances, this actually does happen to some people!

It doesn't cross my mind to think that after going to sleep I might be woken up in the middle of the night to find that my house is on fire necessitating my swift exit to escape and flee for my life ... and yet, again in rare circumstances, this also does happen to some people!

I don't worry for my children when they go out to school, or to meet their friends, thinking that something dreadful will happen to them such as them being knocked down by a motor vehicle, or being abducted by someone and sold into some sort of slavery ... and yet it does happen to some people, and is happening more now than it ever has before!

In some countries there are incidents where people have been abducted by the secret police without warning, never to be seen again. Their families and loved ones are kept completely in the dark concerning their whereabouts. They are taken to some underground cell where they endure torture, starvation, and beatings for their actions, or faith, for years on end and nobody is aware that they are still alive. This has happened to thousands of people in Communist countries, and is such a constant threat, even in our times, that many are afraid to speak because somebody could inform on them.

Then there are lesser worries such as being afraid to sit on a chair in case it breaks; or being fearful to get out of bed just in case the floor has been eaten away in the middle of the night by an army of termites; or opening a can of processed food only to find that some malicious person has put broken glass in it, or injected it with poison.

Fears and Phobias

Catastrophes do happen, but we couldn't live normal lives if we were forever worrying about the 'what if's'. People who do live with these fears are considered by the medical profession to have phobias, and it is both professionally and commonly known that a mental disorder is much more difficult to overcome than any physical disability.

The list of possibilities for catastrophe is endless, that is why so many people in the West take care of these fears by making sure that they are insured up to the hilt with policies which cover their homes, personal effects, death, car, property, not to mention their pets. For those with particular talents or giftings they would even insure their private body assets such as hands (if they were a world famous concert pianist for instance), and other parts of their bodies such as buttocks, breasts, feet, etc. (for models, singers, dancers, or actors). It can actually get quite ridiculous in the end. It is common place to have burglar alarms on houses and cars, and many properties are fitted with CCTV cameras as an added precaution.

We practice family planning to ensure that we don't have more children than we bargained for. When travelling abroad we have inoculations against all manner of diseases which we could catch, and use sanitised wipes to ward off germs. We spray rooms with poisonous substances to kill the mosquitos and ants, and even spray or cream ourselves with similar poisonous products.

Risk takers

On the other hand there are people who have an enormous amount of faith in themselves and will take unnecessary risks to get high on yet another meaningless or dangerous thrill. For some people, the more dangerous, the better the thrill.

I recently watched a documentary of a French high wire walker who, whilst sitting in a dentists' waiting room as a youth of only 17 years old, saw a picture in a magazine of the proposed Twin Towers which were scheduled to be built in New York. Without being attended to he immediately left the room as, from that very moment, he was driven by an obsessive passion to walk across a wire that he would somehow erect between the tops of both towers, and started planning and scheming, even though these towers hadn't yet been built. He had to plan for unforeseen factors such as high winds and poor visibility.

He trained long and hard to fulfil his ambition, and even asked his friends to physically swing on the high ropes he was practicing on in an effort to

dislodge him, for he did not know what extreme weather conditions he would encounter at such an altitude, and needed to be able to keep his balance. Any failure to do so would most certainly lead to his death.

It is a documented fact that some years later this man actually achieved his goal, was taken to prison for trespassing, then quickly released being heralded as a hero for his inspirational behaviour.

Not everyone who has attempted a death defying feat receives recognition. There are those who have lost their lives climbing mountains; and who knows how many people sacrificed themselves to make it possible for us to have a safe means of travel by airplane?

The Guinness Book of Records is full of entries detailing the feats of those who would dare to try to do something extraordinary and break world records. Some activities require sheer stamina and will power, whereas others require much more, and there is an element of risk where they could break bones, lose limbs, or even be killed. But all these people have one thing in common – they have faith in themselves to believe that they can achieve whatever they put their mind to.

My husband (Maurice) had no plans on becoming a gymnast when he was a young boy, all he was interested in doing was becoming a millionaire or at the very least famous. It hadn't really entered his mind how he would achieve this, but that was his goal in life. He ran every time his feet touched the ground, or cycled for hours whenever he had free

time. Being blessed with bagfuls of energy he was one of those kids who just couldn't keep still – he had 'ants in his pants'!

His tireless energy was noticed by school teachers who sometimes picked him to be on one of the sports teams, but he would decline their invitation by saying that he had to get home to do errands for his mum each evening. He enjoyed taking part in school sports, and would have loved to be on the teams, but unfortunately his terrible shyness, which was the manifestation of his inner fear and insecurity, forced him to lie his way out of the very opportunities he would have loved to accept. In this area he had no natural faith.

Go for it

As it happened, one of the sports teachers was actually an ex-gymnast who had been on a former England Gymnastics Team. He spotted Maurice during a lesson and told him to stay behind when everybody else had gone home from school. After giving him some simple moves to do he then suggested something more skilful whilst observing him. Yes, Maurice was what he was looking for so he asked him to join a team of gymnasts he was forming in the school. Maurice, as usual, made all sorts of excuses, but this teacher over-ruled them all, even to the point of having a parent and teacher consultation so that he could get his parents on his side.

Maurice has often told me about the tactics this teacher used to train his team. He would show them

a move, and be on hand ready to flip, help, or catch them, but would tell them to be focussed, saying, "Go for it! You've got nothing to lose. All you may do is break an arm or a leg!"

Happily, none of Maurice's bones were ever broken, and at the age of 16 he embarked on his very first trip abroad to Germany, together with his team mates, to represent England as an international gymnast, and was honoured by being capped for his country after giving their excellent display before other nations. This brought the team recognition from sports TV in Britain and they were asked to perform demonstrations for television. Thus, at the age of 16 Maurice did manage to get some small measure of fame, whetting his appetite for more.

We are certainly not all the same, but as we progress through life we get to know a little of what we are capable of. I would say the majority of people play life according to the rules and act safely, they are not risk takers.

conclusion

Maybe we don't reach our full potential in a particular area because we are not aware of that certain something lying dormant within us which could have been brought out if we were living in different circumstances, or in a different country which was offering different opportunities. Very often our destiny does not necessarily depend on what we know, but rather who we know. The natural man exercising merely natural faith cannot believe in

what he does not understand. He believes in his own abilities. He cannot believe in God, or Jesus Christ, because he has no logical proof of their existence. He only believes in what he can see, and can be logically explained. Supposing a man with a wooden leg stood before this naturally minded man and you were to ask him if it was possible for Almighty God to miraculously make that wooden leg become a normal leg made of flesh, blood and bones, he would adamantly say it was impossible.



3

Fruit of Faith

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

Galatians 5:22-23

As is suggested by the word 'fruit', this second type of faith, when it has taken root, is one that can actually grow with time and experience.

A sower went out to **sow his seed**: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground,

and sprang up, **and bare fruit** an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that has ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 8:5-8

Jesus told this parable openly to the multitudes, but later on his disciples asked him to explain it as they didn't understand what he was talking about.

Now the parable is this: **The seed is the word of God.** Those by the way side are they that hear; then comes the devil, and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and **bring no fruit to perfection.** But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and **bring forth fruit** with patience.

Luke 8:11-15

When we were born naturally, being brought into this world as little babies, we inherited a sinful nature, or 'old nature', from our parents who were themselves sinners. Because of this the words the devil dropped into our minds were readily mixed with our agreement, or faith, and a conception took place which allowed us to indulge in those things that were contrary to the law of God. We didn't consciously think we were obeying

the devil, but in actual fact he was our master because he was the one manipulating our actions. We were in truth the servants of sin, and at best unable to produce anything other than self-righteousness that would not be acceptable to God. Our sinful nature can never produce spiritual fruit that will please God.

If, however, we have been softened and God's word drops into our hearts like seed and is mixed with our agreement, or faith, another type of conception takes place. God's spirit takes root in our hearts and from this very moment spiritual life begins to form within us. It's like having a blindfold removed from our eyes and we start to think, and see things differently. God has become real and we find that, for God, nothing is impossible.

By revelation

The spiritual man who has accepted Jesus Christ as his saviour and Lord has been given a brand new nature. He can believe things that the natural man can never believe because he now has Almighty God living inside him. What is impossible for the natural man to accept, is very possible for the spiritual man to believe because he understands by revelation in his spirit, not with his mind.

If the man with the wooden leg stood before him and he was asked whether it was possible for God to make his wooden leg a normal leg, he would say a most resounding, "Yes!" because he would believe with all his heart that God **could** perform this miracle if he so desired.



4

Gift of Faith

Paul teaches the Corinthian church that they were not meant to be alone, they were all members of one body. So that we can support and strengthen one another there are different gifts operating in the body of Christ, which are distributed at the discretion of the Holy Spirit to various members for the benefit of all, not just the individual.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; **to another faith by the same**

Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

The faith spoken of here is a very special type of faith which is given at specific moments, for specific purposes, by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his disciples that if they had just a mustard seed amount of this type of faith they would be able to tell a mountain to rise up and fall into the middle of the sea and it would obey. This faith is dynamic!

This faith is only operated at the discretion of the Holy Ghost. It is something that leaps into the spirit of a man at a specific moment because God wants to do something very special.

If a man with this faith saw the man with the wooden leg standing before him and was asked whether it was possible for God to make the wooden leg a normal leg, he would leap to his feet, lay his hands on the lump of wood, and it would become flesh beneath his fingers. I doubt whether he would even have the time for his brain to get into gear enabling him to think about what he was doing! He would react in the same way that Peter did on that day when the lame man was begging alms outside the temple. Peter must have seen that man before as he was sitting in his regular spot. Jesus must have

walked past him many times also, which is why Peter would not normally think to take any notice of him. Yet, for some reason on this particular day, something unusual happened and the gift of faith leapt spontaneously into Peter's spirit to make him act without thinking. I'm sure this reaction surprised Peter as much as the lame man! Without preamble Peter gave words of life rather than money when the beggar asked for financial aid.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Acts 3:6

The lame man was immediately healed, jumped up, and began to leap for joy as he praised God.

Joshua had this type of faith when he told the sun and moon to stand still whilst he was in the midst of the battle, and they both obeyed him. The Bible records that this was the most astonishing event in the history of the whole world as nothing like this had ever happened before, or since, that Almighty God would take notice of what a mere human being said.

And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.

Joshua 10:14



5

Grace

God cursed man with the promise that the soul that sinned would die. In the Garden of Eden Adam was specifically given the commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that he ate it he would surely die (Genesis 2:9). Adam did not drop dead on the spot, but that unique relationship he had with God was immediately severed and he was forced out of the Garden of Eden. Gradually his physical life deteriorated – it took nearly 1,000 years for this to happen, but eventually Adam died. Because he had sinned his body was destined to see corruption and go back to being dust. From dust he was created, and to dust he returned. 'For the wages of sin is death', so it says in Romans 6:23, but the marvellous part of that verse is what follows ... 'but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ

our Lord'. This is grace. Paul likens our situation to the proceedings that take place in a pawn shop.

Pawn Shop

If you are in need of money there are shops known as Pawn Shops where you can take an article of value which you feel could be exchanged for money. The Pawnbroker will value it, possibly buy it for a small sum of money, but will then furnish you with a ticket bearing an expiry date. Up to this expiry date the item is still legally yours and you are entitled to go back to the shop to reclaim your article for the specific amount of money the Pawnbroker gave to you, plus interest. After that expiry date, however, the Pawnbroker is no longer under obligation to return the item back to you because the item has now become his legal property. He can charge you what he likes and you will either have to pay his full fee, or it can be sold to another customer at his whim.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the **earnest** expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves

also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the **redemption** of our body.

Romans 8:18-23

Earnest

I have highlighted two words in this passage of scripture. The first word, earnest, is talking of the destined inheritance which is deposited into a believer when he becomes a child of God. Another word we would use is 'pledge'. Originally it meant no more than a pledge; but in common usage it came to denote that particular kind of pledge which is a part of the full price of an article paid in advance; and as it is joined with the figure of a seal when applied to the Spirit, it seems to be used by Paul in this specific sense. The Spirit's gracious presence working in believers' hearts is a foretaste to them of the blessedness of the resurrected new body. God is graciously pleased to give not only pledges but foretastes of future blessedness.

Redemption

This second word 'redemption' means the action of regaining possession of something in exchange for payment. When we go to the Pawnbrokers we redeem our own goods. The debt against us is not viewed as simply cancelled, but is fully paid. Christ's blood or life, which he surrendered for them, is the 'ransom' by which the deliverance of his people from the servitude of sin and from its penal consequences

is secured. It is the plain doctrine of Scripture that Christ saves us neither by the mere exercise of power, nor by his doctrine, nor by his example, nor by the moral influence which he exerted, nor by any subjective influence on his people, whether natural or mystical, but as a satisfaction to divine justice, as an expiation for sin, and as a ransom from the curse and authority of the law, thus reconciling us to God by making it consistent with his perfection to exercise mercy toward sinners. This is grace.

Grace

Don't you know, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness. What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:16-23

Jesus had a body just like ours, but right from conception when the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, as recorded in Luke 1:35, he had the Holy Spirit within him. Unlike us, he was actually born with two natures – the nature of Adam which came from the fact that he had been born of a woman, and this wonderful new godly nature from the Holy Spirit. Throughout his life, although subject to enormous temptation, Jesus never gave in to his fleshly nature once. He always did what his Heavenly Father willed him to do.

This life of obedience pleased God so much that it allowed Jesus to become the perfect sacrifice which God would accept in order to rid the world of sin forever. We had been sold into sin by the disobedience of the first perfect man whom God created, Adam. But the death on the cross of Jesus Christ, the son of God, who had lived a perfect life whilst dwelling in sinful flesh, was what bought our redemption and entitled us, if we accepted that this sacrifice was made on our behalf, to receive full pardon from God for all the sins we have ever, and will ever, commit forever.

Capacity to bear fruit

This spiritual life or nature cannot survive if fed with fleshly things, it will just shrivel and die. Only spiritual food will make this spiritual nature grow and develop, so we are exhorted to yield ourselves to righteousness because now we belong to God. If we accept the blood sacrifice that Jesus paid to redeem us from sin, then that means that God has bought us (he's paid the redemption price necessary to buy

us back from the possible ownership of Satan) and has redeemed us back to himself. If God owns us, that means that we belong to him and are obliged to live according to his rules, and be separate from the world. That makes us holy – separate, different. Paul explains this very well when writing to the Romans in the portion of scripture we have just read.

What a blessed hope we have, especially for those of us who weren't Israelites by nationality. All the other nations, being mere Gentiles, had no hope of this salvation. The prophets, and even Jesus did not come for the Gentiles, they were specifically sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to turn their hearts back to God. The fact that God's own people rejected his son was the very means of our salvation. It gave us not only the opportunity to be grafted on to the olive tree, but also the right to call God our Father. This is what it means to live in the era of 'Grace'. What we as sinners could never achieve, Jesus did for us.

When, as a child, I ever came into contact with somebody who had been adopted, I would look on them with awe and admiration. To me they were very special. I was living with both my biological parents but grew up in a very unhappy home. I knew my mother didn't like me, but it was during the year 2000, when I was 48 years old and God had miraculously reconciled us back together, that she revealed to me the reason for her dislike!

Birth pains

Apparently, when I was being born the midwives

found that the umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck, so in order to free me they cut the cord, but unfortunately snipped my mother's womb also. This caused her terrible complications, and for years she suffered with a septic pelvis, fibroids, and a prolapse. She underwent 3 major operations which didn't cure her, and was in constant pain.

Dad doted on me, being the youngest in the family for the next 6 years, ignoring my older brother and sister as he'd been in the army when they were born and hadn't known them as babies. He found, when I was born, that he really loved little babies.

Dad was my hero as a young child, he always fought my battles and made sure that my older brother and sister looked after me. If they didn't, and I came in crying for any reason, then they would be punished. I was his pet and was allowed to say and do whatever I wanted as it was considered 'cute'. He couldn't see it but I was, in actual fact, a spoilt little brat – with Dad's permission, of course!

When, at the age of 6, my second sister was born all Dad's attention shifted from me and now centred on this tiny, helpless little thing he'd given life to. As she started to grow a little older it was now my turn to look after her and make sure she didn't cry or come to harm, and it was my turn to get punished when I didn't do my job properly. It wasn't long before Dad, too, saw me as a loud mouthed, spoilt brat, who was angry at the turn of events and very rebellious. Mum had my third sister when I was 9 years old, and that was actually when my Mum and Dad turned to God, and Mum was miraculously healed.

Things improved

I must say things got a bit better at home as we all had something in common and went to church together, but there was a basic, underlying problem between Mum and Dad which never got resolved. Now, instead of cursing and swearing at each other, they would argue quoting scripture, and the rows often ended with violence, with Mum rebelliously and provokingly turning the other cheek for yet another punch. She just didn't know when to shut up! The Bible says that a soft answer turns away wrath, but for the life of her she couldn't think of anything soft to say – and to say, "Sorry", just wasn't an option as that was an admission of guilt. So much heartache could have been avoided if she'd just kept quiet.

Mum said she was only staying in the marriage because of the kids, whereas Dad just didn't want to leave the house. It was terrible to feel unwanted, and in the way.

Adoption

When I came across, or read stories about children who had been adopted, my heart would skip a beat for I realised that these children had actually been wanted, and chosen. Some people went to great lengths to adopt. It wasn't like fostering, where the government would pay you a good wage to take kids off their hands, these children in reality belonged to a family. The adoptive parents gave them their family name and took total responsibility for them,

not because they were forced to ...but because they wanted to!

When I realised that this was actually what God did for us Gentiles it made me appreciate being a child of God even more. Because we weren't citizens of the chosen nation we didn't belong to God so weren't his responsibility. He threw out the seed and, because it landed in my heart, the heart of a Gentile, and began to take root, he took me on board and adopted me! This is unbelievably wonderful! You have no idea what God has really done for you to become part of his family. If you did, then you would serve him with every fibre of your being for the rest of your life.

Isn't it wonderful? The fact that we are now in the family of God makes it possible for us to bear fruit, and as already shown, the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, **faith**, meekness, temperance.

Everyone has a measure of faith

God has fully equipped us to be able to do the things that please him by putting his seed (word, law) inside us. Once this seed germinates and begins to grow, then there is no end to the possibilities for producing wonderful fruit, for these are things that grow as we experience God's dealing with us, and we mature.



6

Facing Truth About Ourselves

Paul tells us to take a good look at ourselves so that we can see just how much confidence – or faith – we have in God, as it's impossible to put your whole trust in someone, or something, you don't really know.

When I go to Africa or India I find that Christians are shocked to learn that I have not been inoculated against the diseases which can be contracted, neither do I take Malaria tablets. You see, I have told people that God is in total charge of my life. So, if I am to make this claim, then I had better make sure my life can prove that this claim is for real, and not just a nice speech. So many Christians say, but don't do!

Faith is something that you should grow in – God knew what he was saying when he called it a fruit because

it first comes via a seed. A very small thing that is fragile and vulnerable at first until it is finally established and can grow so big that it can feed other people.

My husband and I have planted fruit trees in the garden which had initially been cultivated in the garden centre before selling to the public. Yet, surprisingly, it takes 2 or 3 years after planting before any fruit appears on the branches, and even then, the fruit is very small and there is hardly any crop. So it is as we begin our walk with God. We don't really know him, it takes years for a relationship to be deeply established with him via many provings and testings. We have to walk carefully to see what he wants from us; and in what way, and with what attitude, we are to give it.

I firmly believe that we should listen to our own words. Many times we say things that are not true, so if we catch ourselves out, then we should do something about it. We should either stop saying the things that prove to be a lie, or else change our lifestyle to confirm what we profess.

Do you steal?

Some time ago I heard a true story whilst in the lumbar regions of Maine, USA. Apparently a new minister had arrived at a church in the area and whilst out walking one day he observed logs being transported down river on their way to the wood mill. To his consternation he saw some of his church members taking the logs to use in their homes as they all had wood burning stoves. He felt that this would do

well to be the topic of his first message. That Sunday he preached a fine sermon entitled, 'Thou shalt not steal', which was well received by his congregation.

Unfortunately, whilst out walking again during the next week he saw exactly the same scene, so determined that his next sermon would be entitled 'Thou shalt not steal – Part 2'. This also was well received and he was given warm handshakes as his members left the building.

The congregation had completely failed to hear what he was preaching about because on his routine walk he again saw them taking the logs from the river. He knew this could not go on as it was stealing, and was a bad witness for his church. Their actions went totally against what he preached. He asked God what he should do about it and was given the title for his next message – 'Thou shalt not steal the logs!' That was his last message in that particular church for the members sacked him. They didn't like being told the truth by a 'young upstart'!

It's always a good idea to give some 'for instances' when either writing books or preaching as, because we all have reasons for doing what we do, it is often very difficult for us to see what everybody else can see clearly, as in the case of the congregation who were 'just collecting wood for their stoves'.

Do you lie?

When my husband and I started looking at what we professed more closely, we found that quite a number of things we said didn't quite fit. We said that we served and trusted Jesus because he was the Lord

of our lives, yet we found that we had set boundaries and limits for ourselves and made an awful lot of decisions without consulting him. We asked God to expose areas where we were controlling our own lives and not letting him choose. He did.

In all honesty, some of the things we did seemed right, as though we were being responsible. I remember the time when, because we had a music band and owned quite a lot of expensive equipment which we transported to different venues when we performed, we took out a 'musicians insurance policy' which was meant to cover our equipment anywhere in the UK.

One day Maurice realised that our insurance policy expired that very day but unfortunately, we had no money to renew it. Quick as a flash I felt the sense of responsibility leap into my heart and it gave me faith to ask God specifically to supply the funds for the renewal fee that very day and was inexplicably confident that God would answer my request.

I had been booked to sing for a jingle session and went to my appointment wondering where the money would come from. To my amazement I was paid upfront instead of having to wait the normal 30 days, something which had never happened before, and knew that this was an answer to my prayer that very morning. I came back waving a large, handsome cheque in Maurice's face, and we both thanked God together, then handed over the money to the insurance company. So, it's strange really, because one of the first things God spoke to us about was taking out insurance against theft. We had said so often

to people, "Nothing can happen to us unless God allowed it", and yet we had asked the 'world' to insure us. Our words and our actions didn't make sense!

God cleared up the dilemma without any problem. All our equipment had been set up for our performance during the morning meeting, so after locking up the church we left it ready for the evening meeting whilst we had gone for lunch. Unfortunately, God allowed the thieves to break into the church! I say 'God allowed' because he can see everything that goes on ... and he didn't stop it!

No problem, we were insured with our 'special musicians insurance policy'. That was my first lesson. Never trust insurance companies! They got out of it, of course, and didn't pay us a bean ... something to do with small print which they had allowed us to overlook to make sure we paid our nice high premium. Maurice, however, got the real message. God showed him clearly that he was putting his trust in the world to look after him when he should have been putting his faith in God.

This was a massive revelation, and God showed him, using Job as an example, that Job could never have been tested with losing all his animals and buildings if he'd taken out insurance policies. Job had to get to the place where he could say from his heart, "God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord". If we already have thought of a 'Plan B' –I'll go out for prayer on Sunday and trust God for my healing, but if he doesn't heal me I'll see the doctor on Monday – we can never learn to trust God, for we have already made an escape plan.

I didn't get it

Because it was Maurice's revelation and not mine, it delayed our progress meaning we had to go through the test all over again. For me, the problem was with the insurance companies so we prayed again, with just as much fervour, that God would give us back what had been stolen. In fact, this time we asked for a double portion. You know the phrase, 'double for your trouble'? ... Well, this is what we prayed for. It took about 18 months of real, hard, laboured prayer, but eventually God gave us twice the amount that had been stolen. In fact Maurice now had 2 beautiful bass guitars – fretted and fretless – which cost around £1,000 each 30 years ago! God really did honour our faith. This time we didn't insure them. At least I had learned that lesson.

A few years later Maurice and I were on holiday and received a telephone call from the people back home that the thieves had again stolen our musical equipment! As there was no insurance to fall back on this time, all we could do was pray and ask God what was going on? He guided us to a scripture which talked about the 2 covenants, saying that the old had to be taken away so that the new could come. We didn't understand what God meant, but I knew I had already fallen out with insurance companies, so there was only God who could sort this one out.

Only a few months before the theft Maurice and I had been ministering in the Midlands, and had just

finished our Sunday dinner when the pastor who was hosting us came downstairs with a suit jacket for Maurice to try on. The jacket was a perfect fit. He then brought down the trousers, together with I think 6 more suits, a couple of which were brand new, and gave them to Maurice. The strange thing was that God had already prepared Maurice for this because he had told him to buy a tie, and smarten up. Being a musician he had liked the image of dressing in bright, frilly shirts, whilst he sat on a stool behind his bass guitar. It made him feel good, but God was soon to tell him it was time to be taken seriously.

So, when the instruments were taken, we came to the conclusion that God was taking from us what we didn't need because he was changing our ministry. It wasn't just the fact that our instruments had gone, this was a whole new direction where I would now sing to backing tracks and Maurice would preach. We bless God so much that we changed our attitude rather than our words. Yes, Jesus was the Lord of our lives, and to prove it we allowed him to do what he wanted in our circumstances. From that time forward Maurice has been known as a teacher rather than a musician.

The 'fruit of faith' had really taken root and was growing strongly in our hearts for if my husband and I had not had this type of faith in God during these trials we would have ended up very confused and fearful. We can say from the bottom of our hearts that nothing can happen to us unless God permits it, and if he permits it then it's because he has a plan to fulfil in our lives. Knowing that should make us rejoice rather than depressed.



7

Bringing Trouble On Ourselves

If you look at the family of God, as you would look at any functional family, it would give you some insight as to how God would deal with his children.

When children do well, good parents will praise their offspring for we all thrive on appreciation. That's the way we train animals, we give them rewards when they do what we want them to do until they learn what is expected in a particular area and then we progress to something else.

How does God discipline his children?

But how does God treat us when we misbehave? Does he bend us over his knee and give us '6 of the

best?' Does he maliciously slap us across the head as we walk past him and are not looking? How does God discipline his children so that they learn to do the things which will please him?

I remember coming home almost in tears one day holding a parking ticket in my hands. Maurice and I do our utmost to avoid these unnecessary expenses as, living by faith, we always seem to be short of money. Izaak, our son who was only about 11 at the time, walked into the room and, seeing my face, asked me what was wrong. I told him what had happened, explaining that I'd only parked for about 5 minutes in a disabled parking spot whilst I did something really quickly.

"Well, I suppose you should think of it like God giving you a smacked bottom!" he said in a matter-of-fact way. Honestly, kids can hit the button every time!

Weak and sickly

I've come to realise that when sickness, or adverse circumstances happen, it's usually God trying to get my attention concerning something. Maybe I need to look at my attitude or behaviour, and make changes. Maybe I need to let go of something and forgive without trying to get revenge. There are so many ways that we fight against pressure instead of asking God why he has allowed it. It would make life so much simpler if we could just let God rule in all our affairs without grumbling and complaining. Why is it that we just don't get the plot?

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

The above scripture is so revealing, for if you are not giving thanks to God for the things that are happening to you, it means you are actually out of the will of God!

Longsuffering is another fruit of the spirit and the only way for this fruit to be exercised, so that it grows, is if you have to suffer for a long time. It's pretty obvious really, but we just don't want to have to face these issues. It's the same for all the fruit of the spirit, these characteristics are only manifested through adversity. So, to go running to the doctor every time you have a headache or a cold doesn't seem sensible. Look at the way you're living first.

If you're staying up till all hours and hardly getting any sleep change your lifestyle, your job, or maybe just get rid of the TV.

If you're eating too much chocolate or cheese, and poisoning your system, change your eating habits.

If you're wearing clothing that's unsuitable for the weather, or constantly sitting in a draught, and you keep getting colds and 'flu, then be sensible and put something warm on to protect yourself. Nobody is forcing you to be a slave to fashion, that's just another way of conforming to the thinking of this world.

There are practical things we can all do to ensure our physical well-being, but sometimes it is a little more complex for the problem is spiritual at its root.

Self examination

Many of God's people suffer physically because they are harbouring sins of rebellion, unforgiveness, anger, or resentment. That is why we are told to examine ourselves before taking communion. It is very clear from the following scripture that many people are sick and weak because they refuse to deal with spiritual defects.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. **For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.** For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world

1 Corinthians 11:28-32

It's not the doctor we need when we feel out of sorts, it's more of Jesus! That will solve the majority of our disorders and keep us right on track with our Master.

Simon the Sorcerer

There is an account in Acts of a man named Simon who was converted from witchcraft to

become a believer in Jesus. After his baptism he hung around Philip, who was one of the apostles, marvelling at the signs and miracles which he was performing in the name of Jesus. Peter and John, who were also apostles, heard how God was working amongst the people of Samaria so came to pray for the believers that they might receive the Holy Ghost. When Simon saw what effect their prayers had on the people he offered Peter and John money in exchange for this same power.

To you or I this request would have probably been met with, "Oh, bless him Lord. He wants to be used of you like you are using us ... " But Peter had a different interpretation of his attitude and rebuked him.

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Acts 8:20-23

He was jealous of the attention the apostles were receiving, being bitter at losing his own standing amongst the people who at one time had considered him to be 'a great one'. It took the Holy Ghost to reveal this as others would not have picked up on it.

Bitterness

My mother had years of pain and suffering, even to the point of needing to have a gall stone surgically removed. The surgeon who removed it remarked that it was the largest stone they had ever seen and wanted to send it to their laboratory for testing. My mother was so proud to have such a trophy that she refused permission and kept it in a jar at home! The story of Simon the Sorcerer leapt into my mind immediately when she told me about her operation.

You would think that parents would be proud and well pleased with their children if they achieve recognition for doing something credit worthy, but my mother always seemed to be the opposite. I don't remember being praised much for anything I did, whether it was singing, acting, playing the organ in the church, or travelling around the world serving God in the ministry. In fact, she seemed to regularly knock me down, even in public.

I remember one occasion when she introduced me to the pastor's wife of the church she was attending at the time who had no notion that I was her daughter. This woman looked seriously surprised, saying, "I had no idea!" Then she related how she had been very ill for a long time, being prayed for by many pastors and even famous evangelists to no avail. "But when Joanna prayed for me I was instantly healed!"

I had no knowledge of this so was as shocked as my mother to hear what she was saying, but my mother retorted, "Well, if God can use an ass, then I suppose he can use anyone!"

I must admit, her response didn't surprise me, but I was sad that she couldn't find it within herself to thank and praise God for having used her daughter. I know that if God were to use my children it would be a much savoured answer to all my prayers.

Jealousy

There was another time when I was excitedly telling her how God had healed people through Nathan, my eldest son, on his first mission trip to India. Upon his return he had shared with us how overwhelmed he felt at the fact that God could stoop so low, humbling himself so much, in order to allow himself to work through such a weak vessel as himself. This revelation that Nathan had received from God blessed me so much. I was rejoicing when I shared it with my mother. But she rebuked me saying, "Why are you telling me all about Nathan? I'm not interested, it just makes me jealous. I wish I was the one out there doing wonderful things for God. It doesn't please me to hear of Nathan, it makes me feel useless!"

Well, it's no wonder some people never experience God using them. Their attitudes stink! It's God's name we are supposed to be lifting up, not our own. If you're in the ministry because you want the praise of men, that's about all you'll ever get because God

will not share his glory with flesh. Either he gets the glory and recognition and you get your reward in heaven, or you get it now and have nothing to look forward to in the future. You will have to choose!

It was no wonder my mother suffered in her flesh so much, and her prayers for healing were not answered.

Not an exception

You'd think I would have learned from my mother's experiences, wouldn't you? No! The sad thing about growing up is that you are a 'know it all' and so stupid that you need to learn for yourself.

My problem wasn't jealousy, it was living a double life. I was a first class hypocrite and, unfortunately, kept up the act even though I knew I was going against what God had told me. Everyone thought I was a really spiritual Christian – in church! But after the meetings I would get dressed up and go to night clubs with ungodly friends. I knew I was playing a dangerous game but felt in control. After a while I realised I was getting trapped and if I wasn't careful I would end up making a mess of my life. I used to pray and ask God to help me, but it was only half-hearted because really **I liked** doing what I was doing.

During one prayer time God even gave me a vision of a huge spider's web which was entangling me. The more I struggled the more tied up I became. I had a glimpse of the huge spider lurking in the darkness, biding his time until I became too tired to

struggle any more. Instinctively I knew that he would come out once I was defenceless, bite me, and suck all the spiritual life out of me, rendering me useless to God any more. This vision was really frightening and I prayed with more earnestness for deliverance.

God answered my prayer, but he did it in his way, and the first thing he did was cause me to be sick. After a whole week of sickness he sent somebody round to my apartment who in actual fact was really a messenger of Satan. Under the influence of Satan, the things this person said to me scared me so much that I locked myself in another room of the house after telephoning my pastor to come to my aid. My visitor left before he came, but I was very badly shaken up.

Within a matter of minutes of being in my apartment God gave my pastor a vision – and it was all about my life. As usual God shrouded what he had to say at first by using a white rabbit which changed to a black one, then changed back again into a white one repeatedly, but I knew he was talking about my double life. I expected that at any moment the whole truth of what I had been doing would come out and waited for the onslaught which would no doubt bring dismissal from any activity in the church – or even ex-communication. But it never came! Instead God then went on to promise what he would do in my life if I would change my ways and turn back to him with my whole heart. Instead of receiving condemnation at his hand, I was given a wonderful promise for the future.

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure

chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Hebrews 12:6-7

God is a good Father

If we could only realise how good our Heavenly Father is then we would not reproach him, but rather thank him for the way he deals with us. His chastening actually made me feel loved and valued. The fact that he considered me worth dealing with gave me the backbone I needed to get out of that web and never look back. I'm so grateful that God didn't let me get away with my sinful behaviour, there's nothing quite like the peace that God gives us, which is born out of having a clear conscience towards him.

It's knowing God, not hearing about him, that makes your faith grow.



8

Believing What God Says

I find it amazing how many people will ask God for a husband or wife, and when somebody comes along who fits their bill they are totally convinced that this is God's choice for them, even though they have only known them for a very brief period of time. It is then equally amazing to find after only a few months that, when the going starts to get tough, they are not averse to filing for a separation or divorce, convinced again that this is God's will.

I've lost count of the number of people who say that God has told them to join a church when at last they have found one that they feel is spirit filled and anointed, only to hear that they are on the move again because they found some underlying problems

which weren't visible at first. Then there are others who have prayed fervently for employment and been given the job of a lifetime from the Lord, only to hand in their notice, yet again, because it wasn't what they'd imagined, and felt that God was telling them to leave.

The worst one is when someone is adamant they have heard the voice of God telling them he was going to heal them, and there were many prophecies given by well-meaning Christians saying exactly the same. This confession is fine, but I find it really sad when the one who was sick actually ends up dying, even after receiving medical attention, and yet nobody asks what went wrong. It's as though the prophecies had never been given, and the profession never made – they just bury their heads in the sand and seem afraid to look at the outcome. It's plain to see that something isn't adding up, especially for those who are left behind grieving, but nobody will own up to having spoken from their own heart, instead of passing on what they heard from God.

Afraid

Professions producing this outcome do not glorify God, in fact they do the opposite. Why are Christians so afraid of death when the truth is that they are escaping this evil world to be united with their Lord? When my mother was old, suffering, and apparently tired of life, I asked her if she would like me to pray for God to take her. Immediately she sprang to life saying, "No! I'm not ready to go yet!" She had been

confined to a wheelchair, and has been in constant pain for so many years. She complained often about her situation as though she was trapped. I asked why she didn't want to be freed from her pain and was shocked at her answer. "I'm afraid. I'm not ready to meet God!"

That's where the rubber meets the road. Those who profess Christianity and have peace with God are not afraid to meet him – it is their heart's desire to be with their Lord. But for those who are not void of offense towards God and man death is a fearful event for they know that they will have to give an account for deeds done in the flesh. In reality the fear of death makes all those verbal Christians out to be cranks.

Wrong type of prayer

Consider the disciples who were in the boat with Jesus when he said, "Let's go over to the other side," and a fierce storm came (Mark 4:35-40). They were seasoned fishermen so had dealt often with raging weather conditions, but during this storm they actually feared for their lives. Jesus was right there in the boat with them but to their astonishment was managing to sleep throughout this tempest – his head still remained on the pillow even though the disciples were being thrown about like toys!

It seems reasonable that they would pray at such a time as this. Yes, that is what they did. Prayer is making a request: "Pray, tell me what is on your mind," "Pray, let me pass," and so on. They woke

Jesus up and made their request in a turned about way, "Don't you care that we perish?" They expected him to get up off his backside and do something to help them. They must have been quite miffed that he could sleep so soundly amidst all this turmoil. He was their leader, yes, but surely he could get up and help them at this perilous time!

What happened next must have been totally unexpected for instead of getting hold of a bucket to bail out water he stood up and told the storm off! Yes, that's what he did – he rebuked the wind and the sea and told them to be peaceful! Then he turned to the disciples and asked them, "Why were you afraid! Why didn't you have faith?"

The more I look at this account, the more astonished I am at the scenario. It was only natural that the disciples would be scared out of their wits. Who wouldn't be? But God was allowing them to go through a practical experience that they would always be able to look back on. They had overlooked one very significant thing – Jesus was in the boat with them.

It's hard to believe that Jesus could be fast asleep during the most horrendous storm the disciples had ever lived through. But, if this same Jesus who could sleep whilst with them in the boat at the most perilous time of their lives **dwells within us**, then what should be the effect of him sleeping as we go through perilous times as Believers? Let the storm rage! let the billows roll! How can we ever be afraid?

They certainly didn't know Jesus then in the same way they later knew him, for when the sea and wind

obeyed his voice they said to one another, "Who is this guy?" Jesus is no ordinary man. If God wants to help us by getting us out of difficult situations do you think he will have a problem with that? My God can do anything! If Jesus in me wants to sleep whilst all hell is breaking loose around me, then God grant me the grace to just lie down next to him and snuggle up close, because that's the safest place I'll ever find in this old world.

Wait patiently for the Lord

I have found that those who truly have the fruit of faith will wait patiently for the Lord. If they have heard the voice of God speaking to them concerning something, then they don't need to go around telling everybody else – they don't need confidence boosters, they just wait for God to bring it about. And if God has put them in a job where they are experiencing difficulty after difficulty, they allow God to do what he is doing in their life without throwing the towel in. If we can't change the circumstances, we need to change our attitudes, for dross will never come to the surface unless a great deal of heat is applied. We can't develop any fruit of the spirit unless we are tried and tested. For faith, we first need hope.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

I have heard many Christians say that if all we have is hope, then we have nothing. I made a search

through the Bible and found that the word 'hope' is mentioned 68 times in the Old Testament and 53 times in the New Testament. In contrast to this the word 'faith' is mentioned 2 times in the Old Testament – Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakuk 2:4, and 229 times in the New Testament. Yes, the word 'faith' was actually only mentioned twice in the Old Testament. David lived his life hoping that what God had promised him would come to pass, hoping in God's word, hoping for the salvation of the Lord.

Hope

Hope is not a negative quality, it is where we begin our journey. We start off by hoping that we can trust something, or someone, not to let us down at a crucial point. If we find that the thing or person we have placed our hope in does not fail us, then we can allow ourselves to place a little trust. Each time we hope and find that we can trust, then our confidence is built up until eventually we can learn to place our faith in that thing or person and know that we will not get let down. Faith is something that grows. It does not come immediately, it is something which we prove over a period of time.

Once we have gained faith in something or someone, then it shouldn't matter what anybody says contrary to what we believe. The personal experiences we have been through should be more convincing to us than other people's opinions.

Believing What God Says

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

1 Corinthians 13:13



9

Which Faith is Jesus Looking For?

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

Substance is tangible. It is something which can be handled, touched, seen. We can prove whether we have faith by the very fact that what we have hoped for eventually materialises and is evident to all that we have not trusted in vain, for God has performed what he promised.

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

Hebrews 11:6

Natural faith and the gift of faith are not the types of faith I want to talk about in this book. I want to dwell on the fruit of faith. We were never led to believe that having faith would be easy, in fact it may surprise you to know that scripture seems to infer that this is not the case at all, and many people gave up believing because they could not hold on to their faith during their testing period.

Wrestling

When reading what we are supposed to arm and equip ourselves with in Ephesians 6, we find that we are to wear: a protective belt, breastplate, sturdy shoes, helmet, and hold both a sword and shield. Then we are told numerous times to ... Stand! ... Stand! ... Stand!

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**. **Stand** therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take

Which Faith is Jesus Looking For?

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Ephesians 6:11-17

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **Stand** against the wiles of the devil.

verse 11

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**.

verse 13

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

verse 14

In this passage of scripture we are made aware of what type of battle we are engaged in. The intention is not to knock out our opponent, as we would if we were boxing, we are meant to wrestle for supremacy. This is a completely different way of fighting. Wrestling is all about getting the opponent to submit defeat, not 'knock his lights out!'

Tools for the job

When writing his letter to the Ephesians, Paul was well aware of what the Roman army wore on the battle field. They couldn't wear the long flowing robes which were standard clothing at that time for it would hamper their movements. They needed

substantial gear that would protect their vital parts and not tear easily. He especially knew how important it was to have the right sort of shoes to enable them to do the job.

The sandals the soldiers wore were by no means typical of the beach sandals we would wear today. They were purpose built, certainly not flimsy, so that they fitted securely without snapping off. The soles were fitted with metal spikes which would grip the earth beneath their feet enabling them to do battle in muddy fields without falling, quite similar to football boots but without the finesse. When on the advance to push back the enemy, the Roman soldiers would link and lock arms whilst digging their sandal spikes into the ground, thus enabling them to hold their position without slipping and sliding, and move forward in lines. Their main objective being to take territory.

They were a mighty force to be reckoned with, being very well disciplined, and well versed in the art of warfare. We would do well to learn from their tactics.

Hedged in by God

The reason the apostle told us to wrestle is that we cannot kill evil spirits as we could flesh and blood. No, spirits are eternal beings and we can only fight them using legality. Let's take a look first of all at someone who actually managed to grab God's attention and earn his respect. Do you remember the Old Testament story of Job? During the dialogue in

heaven between Satan and God, Satan complained that he couldn't get near Job because of the hedge that was around him.

Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?

Job 1:10

Just one tiny bit of information which we receive from reading this account gives us incredible insight into what actually goes on in the heavenlies. The Bible clearly shows that because Job was serving God with all his heart, as an upright and honest man, one that feared God and eschewed (meaning deliberately avoided using, and abstaining from) evil, God had placed a hedge around him, his wife, his children, and all he owned. Satan could not get near him, having no authority to touch him. The only way that Satan could get to Job was via God, as God was in control of everything taking place in Job's life, and Job was completely protected.

God was boasting to Satan that there was actually a man on the earth whom he had blessed with untold riches and wealth yet had not abandoned the giver of these abundant gifts as other people had done. He was so confident in Job's integrity towards himself that he was actually throwing out a challenge to Satan to see if he could alter Job's attitude towards him. So then, it's no wonder that Satan should grumble. How was he to attack Job if there was no way through or around that hedge? God had an unfair advantage and Satan knew it. So

did God! The prayers and lifestyle of Job had given God this absolute legal right.

Satan had put up a good argument so God gave him permission to get through the hedge thus enabling him to attack Job. And, my dear reader, that's the only way that Satan can get through to anyone who utterly lives for and belongs to God. Yet no matter what Satan threw at Job, and he was most malicious in his choice of tortures, Job would not sin with his lips, thus maintaining his integrity. He wrestled. Yes, he just stood his ground, and wrestled.

Hedged in by Christ

Jesus did the same thing for those whom he had called and specifically chosen to be his disciples. So long as they were living in the same fashion as Job had done – fearing God and abstaining from evil, then they were under his divine protection because they were being sent out to do his will.

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Mark 16:17-18

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his

Which Faith is Jesus Looking For?

hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Acts 28:3-6

We don't read here of Paul worrying about being bitten by such a dangerous snake. He knew what God's intention was for his life, which is apparent if we read Acts 27:23-25. He had already been told that he must appear before Caesar to be a witness for Jesus Christ, so he wasn't going to be put off his mission by being concerned about something that was of no consequence. Shaking the viper off his hand into the fire he just carried on as normal, not even aware of being watched. Paul lived his faith.

The disciples didn't start out being confident that what Jesus had promised them would be fulfilled. Like all of us we have to walk carefully as we are walking in uncharted territory. This type of relationship with God needs to develop.

By the way Peter exclaimed, "But Lord, we have left all to follow you!" (Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28) we see that there is a bit of panic in his heart. Jesus had just told them that it was impossible for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God! The disciples were following Jesus because they believed that he was the Messiah – the 'One' who would overthrow the

Roman occupation and deliver Israel. They believed that they would be well looked after when Jesus came to power, so like all revolutionaries gave up everything they owned for the 'cause' being assured that when the reversal came they would end up with everything – power, wealth, status. The lifestyle that Jesus was teaching was brand new, and it was very hard for the early disciples to get their heads around what Jesus was asking of them.

The fruit of faith starts as a small seed and with time and patience is expected to grow into a solid, mature plant which can weather adverse elements endeavouring to destroy it completely.

Moses

We see this very clearly if we take a look at the life of Moses. The wonders God performed using this man were never seen before nor have they been seen since, but he started off just like you or me, nervous of what would happen next. We see this in the way he tried to persuade God to use someone else rather than himself. He wasn't seeking fame or grandeur, and after 40 years in the wilderness had lost the ability to argue with convincing words as he had done in the court of Pharaoh.

When God instructed him to put his hand inside his coat next to his bosom he had no idea what was about to happen. Moses might have been reluctant to take on this job that God wanted him to do, but he knew how to respond when given orders. After living in the house of Pharaoh as his son, he would

have been educated and trained both in giving and taking orders, for the might of any country is in their ability to subdue enemies. Moses surely would have been a well trained soldier.

And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh.

Exodus 4:6-7

One could almost feel sorry for Moses. It must have been terrifying for him when, taking his hand out of his coat, he found it white with leprosy. God didn't warn him this would happen, he just acted on an order. What if God were to leave him in that condition, what would he have done next? Moses had come up against someone more powerful than himself. He knew who his Master was and wasn't prepared to put up a fight, when there was no way he would win anyway. I marvel at the way he managed to put his leprous hand back inside his coat onto his bosom, for maybe he was thinking his whole body would now become leprous. But he did it, even though he didn't know what the outcome would be, he did it.

This was no ordinary job being offered by God. He needed a man who would act immediately, without question, without argument, and eventually without even fear – a man who would act in faith.



10

Where Do We Start?

We entered into a relationship with God by this fruit of faith being planted into our hearts, but this fruit is something that develops and matures with experience. Adversity proves whether we can or cannot trust someone or something. There's nothing simpler than observing what others do, then begin to imitate their actions thinking that we are just following the rules.

Copying others

Just because everybody else does something doesn't mean it's right for us. I once knew a family who had taken in a young woman, who hadn't had a proper family life, to live with them. Although she had a biological mother and father who were still

alive she had been put into foster homes from a young age. Having had no siblings of her own she had no idea how families operated.

The couple who had provided her with a home had 2 young daughters. After shopping for clothes one day the 2 young girls wanted to show their father what they had bought so eagerly ran into their lounge, hid behind the sofa to change, then reappeared wearing their new garments. Observing their behaviour, the young woman decided that she would do the same so, hiding behind the sofa she also changed her clothes. As she was in her mid 20's the young girls were quite shocked at what she was doing – so was their father who was also in the room! This behaviour, if only she had known it, was not acceptable from an older woman who didn't actually belong to the family. There are certain rules which are unspoken, but subconsciously we are all well aware they exist.

My Lord and my God

Because it is common terminology in our churches to say that Jesus is Lord of our lives doesn't mean that it is, in actual fact, true. On the basis of the fact that God uses it more often than any other important word in the Bible, the word 'Lord' becomes the most essential term in any language to the welfare of any person. It is not enough that one knows God is God, for only a fool would deny that (Psalm 53:1), but God demands of every person who is to be recognised by him that he accept him

as Lord of his life, his sovereign ruler, to whom he yields implicit obedience. When Thomas was able to say of Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28) his doubts ceased to exist. Nothing short of that meets God's demands. Watch for the word 'Lord' in the Bible; it occurs around 5,000 times.

Be Real

Some years ago I took a long, hard look at my own personal life and realised that I was just saying words. I believed that what I was saying was true, I wanted them to be true, but in actual fact I was just imitating words I had heard other 'Christians' use because in truth I was mostly making my own choices.

It never crossed my mind to ask God whether I should spend money on buying another pair of shoes, or another coat, after all I was only spending what I had earned. It was **my** money! I didn't ask his counsel concerning whom I should meet up with to have a coffee at lunchtime, or whether he wanted me to work overtime to earn a little extra cash. It was **my** spare time! Taking out insurance to cover theft or damage for the items I had bought seemed the logical and most responsible thing to do, why on earth would I ask God what he thought about that? And when I was first married, well, we needed time to get adjusted to one another without the responsibility of children, so I didn't consult him concerning birth control either.

Yes, there so many areas where I denied my Lord and my God from being my Lord and my God. He

wasn't my Lord, I just wanted him to look after me and back me up concerning all the decision I had made, because in reality **I was lord** of my own life. Frank Sinatra wasn't the only one guilty of doing it his way, I think there are very few who can refute the ..."I did it my way" scenario.

It's our decision

So, let's be honest and say what we mean. I'm sure God is not going to get mad at us if we say we find it difficult to allow him to be Lord of our lives. In the Old Testament we read that even slaves were given the opportunity to find out for themselves whether their masters were worth serving, for after 6 years of service they were given back their freedom and allowed to find another employer. But, if they had experienced that the man they had served for 6 years was a good master by: treating them fairly; providing for and protecting them; earning their love and respect; then they could, of their own free will, remain a servant in his household. But this was only on the condition that they had their ear bored through with an awl, so that everybody would know that they were no longer free men looking for employment.. They were now bond servants.

This is very typical of how God treats us. It may appear that we had no choice in the matter when we first had an encounter with him, but there will definitely come a time when we will be offered the opportunity to 'go out free' back into the life we once had. If, however, we come to our senses

and realise that we have grown to love God, have found he is worth serving, and the old life is not the alternative we want, then we can stay with him as his bond servant for ever. We can no longer be free. However, my friend, this type of service comes at a very high cost to our old nature. It means we are handing over **all** our rights because, of our own volition, we have accepted our master as our Lord and our God.

When Paul had the continual irritation of a thorn in his flesh he asked God 3 times to remove it. God firmly said, "No!" adding that it was necessary for Paul to have this discomfort because it kept him humble after all the revelations given to him. Paul had to be content with this explanation and said in his letter to the Corinthians that he would rejoice in what God had designed for him.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. **Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities**, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore **I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake**: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Paul knew how to live as a revolutionary. He knew that whatever he suffered in this life was nothing to be compared to what God had planned for those who loved him in the future Kingdom. He was more than willing to live a frugal life in this world to gain his crown, and exhorted us to do likewise, by fighting the good fight of faith because what God has promised will surely come to pass.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Philippians 4:11-13

...Supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But **godliness with contentment is great gain**. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love,

Where Do We Start?

patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:5-12

When Jesus walked the earth his whole ministry was spent educating us about the coming Kingdom. By example he showed us that it was possible for us to put our whole trust and faith in God. In flesh and blood he lived a sinless life, loving and fearing God, eschewing and avoiding evil, proving that if we only seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all the things we could ever wish for – food, drink, clothes – will eventually come to us.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:31-33



11

Adversity – Perfect Tool to Prove Us

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

1 Peter 1:7

The Kittens

I remember once being given 2 kittens who brought sunshine into my life when I lived alone. These little sisters had been given to me as a birthday present by a colleague a few months prior to my leaving work and going into full time ministry for God. I went on tour and arranged for someone to

look after them for me, but when I returned home one of the kittens was missing. We hunted high and low and Maurice later found her in the garden. She had been run over, flung over the hedge and was half eaten by maggots.

The other kitten became more precious after this loss. I allowed her to have kittens and, when they had been weaned and passed on to other families to love, I took her to the vet to have her sterilised. My cat never came round from the anaesthetic and I was told by the vet that this was very rare and only happened once in every 10,000 operations!

I was angry at God, I mean really angry. I couldn't understand why he had allowed this. The cats had never stopped me from serving him, I had never had an 'inordinate affection' for them, and if he had asked me to give them away to somebody who needed their company more than myself, I wouldn't have refused. But to take them like this – without even asking – was going too far! And would you believe it, I was so miffed at God's behaviour that I vindictively 'sent him to Coventry'. Me! Joanna Barratt! This frail bit of dust had a grudge against Almighty God and wanted to show him how much he had hurt me by trying to hurt him back!

I'm appalled now that I could possibly have had this sort of attitude, but at the time I felt my actions were totally justified. Thank God he didn't allow me to carry on sulking. After 3 days he brought me to my senses and arranged circumstances where I was forced to break the ice. But I've never forgotten how high and mighty my old nature is if allowed freedom

to exert itself.

We have to face obstacles and problems in order to see what's in us, only in this way can we make progress.

Obstacles

For anyone who is not an animal lover this story will seem rather ridiculous, but we all have tender spots and God always seems to know just where to prod so that the wrong attitudes which lurk inside us can be seen.

We take so much for granted when we become Christians, we almost expect to live charmed lives where nothing goes wrong because 'God loves us and wants the very best for us'. But if he's going to answer our prayers and change us from what we are, to what he wants us to be, then he puts obstacles in our way which cause us concern and pain, because we can't see certain circumstances through without his help. Trials are not reasons to turn away from God, they are meant to make us run towards him. James said, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Freed from the curse

My first child, Nathan, was breech all the way through my pregnancy. I prayed that he would turn, others prayed that he would turn. People actually prophesied that he would turn and I would be, "Freed from the curse, have a pain free delivery

and everything will be perfect!" (God forgive them for taking his name in vain and speaking their own thoughts instead of his). I was convinced that because I was a dedicated Christian, serving the Lord in every way I knew how, that a miracle would happen. The labour was hard and long and after 12 hours I still wasn't opening up. The baby, being caught in the birth canal, was in distress and the doctors rushed me off for an emergency caesarean operation. I questioned God as I was being wheeled away. I was frightened and bewildered. But I came through it. My baby, Nathan, was safe, although marked on his legs and buttocks from being 'stuck' inside me for too long.

I longed to have another child so that Nathan could have a friend and companion, and God allowed me to fall pregnant again. Unfortunately, on the very day of Nathan's 2nd birthday I miscarried unexpectedly. This test was very hard to cope with – especially as I was informed that the baby I was carrying had been dead inside me for the past 4 weeks and I didn't even suspect anything was wrong.

When the midwives gave the news to me I broke down in uncontrollable tears. I was almost 42 and, getting married rather late in life, didn't feel that time was on my side to have more children. I was taken to a cubicle with Maurice to calm down and as my heart was breaking a strange thing happened.

It is said that when you are drowning your life passes before your eyes. Well, I saw my life pass before my eyes – all the hardships, lack of love, and hurts of my childhood and teenage years. But then

what God had brought me into; a loving marriage relationship, a healthy 2 years old child, a ministry, a future – and in that instant I spoke to my husband saying, "No recriminations!" Then from my lips came those words which Job had uttered: "God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord". I really meant it at the time, but the next few months showed me what was really in my heart.

Although I had accepted God's ruling in allowing the child I was carrying to die, I really resented the fact that he had come to that decision and each day, when in prayer, would persistently beg that he would give me another child. Even when I had kittens I had 2 instead of 1 just so that they could play together when I was not around.

As time went on God kindly showed me what I was in actual fact doing – I was putting pressure on him. I wasn't leaving the future in **his** hands, I was asking him to give me what **I** thought was best for me.

Repentance

When the reality of what I was doing hit me I immediately repented and, to show my remorse about treating God in this way, gave away all the baby things I'd stored to a pregnant woman I knew who lived 100 miles away. Within a week of doing this I began to have morning sickness!

A few weeks prior to my being sick God woke Maurice from his sleep one night and told him he was going to bless him with another son, but he didn't

breath a word about this to me. The first morning I was sick Maurice knew without us even getting it confirmed by a doctor that I was pregnant and told me he had already written it down in his diary.

Faith flooded my soul. I now knew that not only was I pregnant but I was going to have a son. Whilst asleep 5 days later God told me in a dream to name this child Izaac. The desire of my heart had been fulfilled and I can't express in words how happy I was.

It's strange though, as with Izaac also, I had a difficult birth. I had to be cut before Izaac was extracted from me by means of a ventouse delivery. My stitches got infected and I was in extreme agony for a couple of weeks after his birth. Yet I firmly believe that God knew what he was doing all the time. I have always been blessed with good health, almost to the point where I have criticised others more weak and frail. I think it's necessary for people like me to experience, once in a while, what others go through so that we learn to be grateful for our personal blessings instead of critical of other peoples' apparent failures or curses.

Don't Get Mad

God really does answer prayer, but he answers in a way that we rarely anticipate and, before he touches those we are asking him to change, he usually puts his finger on us to alter our attitude first. Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and if we are to follow in his footsteps we have to tread

the path which he trod. Don't get mad at God when he answers your prayers in his way and not yours. Believe me, it's all working for your ultimate benefit, maturity, and happiness.



12

Lazarus is Not Dead!

I would like to go through a passage of scripture which shows how differently 2 people reacted after having received the same promise. You may have read it dozens of times but let me see if I can show you something you have never seen before.

Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the

Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

John 11:1-6

First of all I would like you to understand what's happening here. This passage clearly says that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. That must mean that they all had a very personal relationship with each other. They must have spent time together to develop this relationship, either this family coming to visit and hear Jesus whilst he was out preaching, or Jesus visiting them at their home.

Unprepared

We do know of a time when Jesus went visiting and found only Mary and Martha there.

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath

chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Luke 10:38-42

Never one to worry about protocol or reputation Jesus didn't bat an eyelid at the fact that Lazarus was not around and made himself comfortable in their home. Martha was obviously flustered that Jesus and some of his disciples had descended upon her unannounced, and hastily tried to get refreshments prepared for them.

Unlike those of us who live in the West, she couldn't just pop out to a local shop to buy fish and chips, pizza, a ready made cake, or packets of snacks. She would need to prepare things in her own little kitchen from scratch, and that would have taken up much time.

She looked over at Mary and saw her sitting at Jesus' feet drooling over his every word. She smarted! That girl was bone idle and had no understanding of responsibility. To look after the guests was the custom in their culture, but she didn't even seem to notice that Martha was running around like a scalded hen trying to get food ready.

Poor Martha couldn't contain her frustration and even got mad at Jesus for not caring that Mary had left her alone to do all the serving. Why hadn't he done something about the situation and told Mary to help her?

I can just imagine the wry smile that must have come over Jesus' face when she ranted at him. He must have been quite amused. He tried to calm her

down with a loving, "Martha, Martha," which must have seemed like, "There, there now, calm down." Jesus loved these women – he loved this entire family. They were his close friends. He knew what she was going through emotionally, but he couldn't allow her to dampen Mary's spirit. Gently pointing out that she was worried and careful about too many things, he tried to explain that in this instance Mary had got it right.

It wasn't every day that Jesus came to visit. This was a special moment when he wanted to spend personal and private time with them. He had not come to be served or fed. No, he had come to do both the serving and the feeding. How privileged these women were for Jesus to visit them in this way.

Sometimes doing what is right, is so wrong. Poor Martha didn't read the situation correctly, but very often we are in danger of doing exactly the same thing. We need to know what's on God's mind so that we can discern when to be motivated and busy, and when to be still and just listening. But I suppose we can only get to this place when we have developed a good relationship with him and really know him well.

One thing is for sure, from that incident Martha is branded by many preachers as a very carnal Christian, whereas Mary is considered to be super-spiritual, the Christian model.

So, getting back to the original story, we find that their brother, Lazarus, was sick. They sent word to Jesus, via friends, of their dilemma, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."

Message of hope

It was common knowledge that Jesus loved this family, their relationship was so obvious. Jesus immediately responded by giving them a reason to hope, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." He sent the family friends away with this message expecting Martha and Mary to hold on to his promise, because then we read – 'Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode 2 days still in the same place where he was.'

We know that Jesus answered to his Father and at his own confession only did what his Father was telling him to do. What possible reason would God have for not allowing Jesus to go to his friend? Why did he want him to delay?



13

Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled

Jesus, in front of many witnesses, had promised emphatically that this sickness would not be unto death, but for the glory of God, that the son of God might be glorified through it. So, let's see what Jesus meant by 'not unto death', for surely his interpretation of those words is completely different to ours.

Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because

there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

John 11:7-16

The first thing we need to appreciate is the very fact that this was a risky journey for Jesus. The disciples didn't really need to remind him that the Jews were looking out for him with the intention to stone him. He was a 'wanted' man. The Jews were desperate to get rid of him. Jesus needed to be sure that he was acting under God's instructions otherwise he would be giving a legal right to Satan to get through the hedge that God had built around him. Nobody was more aware of Satan, and what he was capable of, than Jesus.

But after staying put for 2 more days he told his disciples that he was ready to return to Bethany, because he was walking 'in the light' and was under the divine protection of God.

Lazarus is sleeping

He then tried to explain the situation concerning Lazarus. Of course, the disciples couldn't make out

what he was saying at first because he spoke about Lazarus 'sleeping' and that Jesus intended to go and 'wake him up'. Well, they thought, that was great. If Lazarus was sleeping then his body would be busily working to repair itself – this was a good thing. But what the disciples meant by sleep, and what Jesus meant by sleep, were two different things entirely.

The flesh is of no consequence to God. That is what we are clothed in until we receive our new body which will live forever. The same spirit that dwelt in our mortal flesh will one day inhabit that new body which awaits us, so God does not see death in the same light as us. He merely sees it as 'sleep', for one day we shall wake up in his presence, transformed into his likeness so that we can dwell with him, and be as he is.

But, for the sake of their terminology and lack of understanding in spiritual matters, he spoke to them in their own vernacular – "Lazarus is dead!" But he didn't leave it there. That was the whole point of this exercise where God was concerned. He said he was actually glad that he hadn't been there to heal him, because what they were about to witness would convince them of who he was, and their faith would grow.

And, just for the record, whatever we may think of Thomas – you know, the way he doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead when he appeared to all the other disciples except him – let it be known that in this passage he is commended for his loyalty and courage. For, although they believed they could well be marching to their death if they went along

with Jesus back to Bethany, Thomas was the first to voice that they should go and die with him. The men disciples by Jesus were all God's choice. Never forget that.

Anticipation

I have often wondered how Jesus felt inside knowing that he was about to perform this remarkable miracle. He had healed many sick people, cast out devils, multiplied a simple meal so that it fed thousands of people, but he was now about to do something even more extraordinary. Something that had never been witnessed before. People were going to glorify God, and he also would be seen in a different light. Maybe this was what he had been waiting for – the time when he would be publicly glorified and accepted as Messiah by the people he had come to save.

Did he feel sorry that Lazarus was dead? Not at all! This was the most vital part of the plan. Without death, and days of decay, there was no notable miracle. No, this was all part of the plot which would bring God honour, and Jesus could hardly wait for it to be fulfilled.

I have tried to put myself into his shoes to understand what he would be feeling – I imagined that I had gone on a missions trip leaving my husband behind to look after my small children. My little girl, Tamar, used to go to bed cuddling a soft toy, a rabbit, and for some reason couldn't get to sleep without it. One day my husband rang to tell

me that a dog had been playing with the toy rabbit and ripped it's ears off with his teeth. The rabbit was now torn with the stuffing coming out of it. My husband wouldn't let Tamar take it to bed for fear that it would fall to pieces, and no matter what he said or did she could not be consoled. She cried, and cried, and cried.

"Don't worry, send it to me in the post. I'll repair it for her and bring it back with me when I return!"

Wait patiently for the Lord

There would be absolutely no way that this incident would upset me for I knew that once I had replaced that rabbit's ears and sewn it up, it would look as good as new. So, Maurice sent it to me. I set about fixing it, packed it in my suitcase, and travelled back with it to my family.

To be honest I was almost pleased that Tamar was still crying. As soon as she saw me she ran sobbing into my arms with tears streaming down her face as she babbled on about her toy rabbit and what that awful dog had done to it. I looked into her little tearful eyes, holding her gaze as my eyes twinkled back at hers. I felt so excited.

I opened my suitcase and pulled out a brightly wrapped parcel with a little ribbon on top, telling her to open it up. She eagerly took it from my hands and began to rip open the present. She couldn't believe her eyes when she saw what was inside. It was a rabbit. Her rabbit. He looked like he had always looked with not a tear in sight.

Tamar was delighted. She flung her arms around my neck and kissed me so much, telling me that I was the best Mummy in the world. Her love and gratitude almost overwhelmed me. It was a wonderful experience.

Yes, I think Jesus must have been filled with excited anticipation as he and his disciples journeyed to the village of Bethany



14

Lazarus is Dead!

Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: and many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

John 11:17-21

Lazarus Was dead! It didn't matter what Jesus said, the fact was there was a dead body in the tomb that was actually rotting and decaying, and had been for four days! The sisters had waited for Jesus to answer their call for help, but he had not come in time.

These two women must have been devastated. I can only imagine that Mary did not realise Jesus had arrived because she was so grief stricken at the death of her brother. She was a very emotional woman and the shock of this death must have made her feel, and react, like stone. She wasn't aware of anything that was going on around her, she was locked into her grief.

Martha, however, heard that Jesus had at last responded to their call for help and rushed out to meet him. What she said when she met him was what Jesus would have expected to hear, her acknowledgement that he could have altered this situation. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" But it was what she said after these initial words which must have filled Jesus with joy and anticipation, for they were words full of faith and hope, even after death.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, **Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.**

John 11:22-27

I don't believe for one moment that she thought it was in Jesus' mind to raise Lazarus then and there from the dead. She did, however, know that he had a special relationship with God Almighty, and whatever he asked of God, even at this late stage, God would give it to Jesus. Surely Jesus must have something up his sleeve that he could pull out now to change this situation. Just what, however, I'm sure she didn't know.

It was the very fact that she was eagerly waiting in anticipation for him to do something which must have filled his heart with joy. Somebody truly believed in him. This was the miracle he had hoped for, that he would be recognised as the Son of God and glorified as he had predicted.

He responded to her with the same eagerness she had shown, saying, "Your brother shall rise again." He was meaning now, today, in the presence of everyone here, but she just saw this as a future event when everyone shall rise in the resurrection at the last day.

"No, Martha, I am the resurrection, I am the life; anyone who believes in me, even if he's dead, shall live: and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

I don't know really whether she fully understood what he was saying to her. There must have been confusion in her mind as they had trusted in him, Lazarus had trusted in him, but it didn't alter the fact that there was a dead body in the tomb. Yet, through all the turmoil that must have been going on in her mind, her response is quite a revelation.

Jesus is glorified

"Yes, Lord: I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

There is was. That was what Jesus had been waiting for. He had been recognised for who he was – the Son of the Living God, not just the Messiah, whom everyone was expecting to be sent into the world. Where did that revelation come from? Martha was the woman whom we have pushed to one side and considered carnal and un-spiritual. Yet here she was speaking things that were secret.

There was only one other instance I can recall of anyone saying words like this and that was when Jesus was asking his disciples whom men thought he was (Matthew 16:13-17). Some responded with: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. When he asked them whom they personally thought he was, Simon answered that he was the Christ, **the Son of the Living God**. To which Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is in heaven."

This information was not given to everyone. Jesus kept his cards close to his chest. He had a job to do and was not prepared to share his secret, thus putting the plan of God in jeopardy. Even when he did certain miracles he instructed people not to let anyone know what he'd done. It was not the time for his secret to be revealed.

Yet Martha had been given this divine revelation! I don't believe that information like this is given to just anyone, but only to those who are truly seeking truth, and the Kingdom of God. I also don't share people's opinion that Martha was a 'carnal, un-spiritual Christian'. In fact, it is my conviction that she was the more spiritually aware of the two sisters.

Jesus wept

Having had this conversation with Jesus, Martha rushed back to the house to whisper to Mary that Jesus had arrived and wanted to speak with her. Mary now heard and quickly went to meet him. However, she was not alone. The Jews, mourning with her in the house, thought that she was going to the tomb so followed with the intention of comforting her. So, instead of just Mary coming to meet Jesus, he was confronted with a whole crowd.

When she saw him she fell at his feet in tears.

And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his

feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

John 11:28-32

The words coming from her lips were exactly the same as those spoken by her sister, Martha – "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" But the tone was completely different. These words didn't lift the spirit of Jesus for he detected no trace of hope, faith, or belief. The words were hard, brutal, full of anger, and bitterness.

They had sent messengers to him days ago, but he had not come. He had let them down. He could have altered this situation, healed their brother as they'd seen him heal many before. But it was obvious to her that their friendship meant nothing. He had failed them.

Her words hit him hard. I'm certain he had not anticipated her reaction. This had been hidden by God because it was necessary for him to experience all the emotions his Father was forced to experience. Jesus certainly was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

Compassion?

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which

opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

John 11:33-38

Some say that Jesus wept out of compassion. I say he didn't. He knew from the beginning that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, and this very miracle would bring more glory to God than anything else he had done so far. He didn't weep because he felt the grief of those mourning the loss of a loved one for in his spirit he knew that Lazarus was **not dead**, he was just sleeping.

No, his tears, his groaning in his spirit, his troubled heart were brought about by the total rejection he was feeling at that very moment. Mary had expressed love and faith, said all the right things, acted in all the right ways, sat at his feet hanging on to every word that fell from his lips. Yet, when adversity came, when she was called on to exercise faith, she couldn't believe in him. Love is proved in adversity.

The situation was made worse by those Jews standing around. The crowd were divided for some thought he wept because he had loved Lazarus so much, but from the others however, he could feel criticism, and disdain when they muttered to each other concerning what he could have, but didn't do. The doubt and unbelief that surrounded him at that moment must have been like a crushing weight on his back. It was a very heavy burden which made him groan again in his spirit.

How many of us have been given wonderful promises from God, even received marvellous answers to prayer, and been totally deflated when relating our experiences to others. We share confidently with people expecting to see God's name glorified, only to find that people refuse to acknowledge God in anything that happens, making us out as gullible fools, and putting it all down to mere coincidence.

Jesus was really looking forward to God being glorified, and himself being recognised as the Son of God, yet it was just this one woman, Martha, who had spotted it. The scales had not fallen from the eyes of everyone around, just from her. She truly must have had a personal relationship with God.

Rejection

I imagine at that moment Jesus must have felt as he did when he looked over Jerusalem and wept.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

Luke 19:41-42

He spoke these words just before going up to the temple to throw out the money-changers. The zeal of his father's house had eaten him up and he was compelled to set God's house in order before he

went to the cross. He knew by revelation what would happen to Jerusalem in the future if they rejected him, they would have to pay a very heavy price.

For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

John 11:43-44

But he couldn't do anything about it. They had been given free will to choose or reject, and so far all but a few had rejected.



15

Can I trust my Feelings?

Many of us, when we get to this point in a trial, just throw the towel in and question whether we heard the voice of God in the first place. Whatever faith we once had would have well and truly been doused with doubt, and fear would have begun to set in.

"What if I didn't hear God correctly and it was all from my own imagination? What if he doesn't answer and come through for me after waiting all this time? I'm going to look a fool! I'm going to lose all credibility!"

Everybody mourning and trying to bring comfort to Martha and Mary on this particular occasion would try to pacify these poor women with the words that

nothing more could be done. They all loved Lazarus and grieved his passing, but this was something they would have to accept and, in time, get over.

Each and every one of us have to face these difficult situations. It's part of life, part of growing up. Life is not a bed of roses and we shouldn't expect it to be. Things are not meant to be level all the time. On any journey there are both hills and valleys. Our moods are sometimes up, sometimes down. Our very heart beat when seen on the screens of hospital monitors shows that it goes up and down. The only time it levels off is when we're dead!

Are you waiting for a promise from God to be fulfilled? When you received the promise, did he give you a specific date/time that the promise would be fulfilled? If he wasn't specific about timing, then he expects you to hang on and keep believing for that is what Hebrews 11:6 is all about:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him ...These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Hebrews 11:6 & 13

Once we have received the promise we are no longer required to have faith! Do you remember the scripture which opened up this book?

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

Luke 18:8

Love turns to rejection

What a disappointment for Jesus. If only they had hung on to their faith and believed his words to them, they would have seen the glory of God in action with their own eyes, receiving commendation for having the patience to inherit what was promised. But it was too late for that now. They had shown their true colours and revealed to him that their faith was very shallow. They believed what they saw with their own eyes more than his eternal words. They didn't pass the test that God had put before them. Like I said before, love is proved in adversity. It was obvious that what they thought was love was in truth infatuation, and in a moment of pique their counterfeit 'love' turned to criticism and bitterness.

Reading the following account of what went on between Amnon and his half sister Tamar will clearly show how the pendulum swings from one emotion to the other with this type of counterfeit love.

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her.

But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab,

the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man. And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister. And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand. So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand.

Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat. So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. And she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes. And she took a pan, and poured them out before him; but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me. And they went out every man from him.

And Amnon said unto Tamar, Bring the meat into the chamber, that I may eat of thine hand. And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister. And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in

Israel: do not thou this folly. And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.

Then **Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her.** And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.



16

It's Past Midnight!

The anticipation was gone now for Jesus. There is nothing quite so effective as doubt and rejection to dampen the spirit. Jesus walked in flesh and blood and felt every spiritual blow like a hammer. He groaned in his spirit as he came to the grave, telling them to take the stone away.

Here again he came under attack for the very person who had expressed persistent faith, and had received a dramatic revelation as to who he was via his Father, now objected to his request by saying that Lazarus had already been dead for 4 days, and by this time he would be stinking. In this intense heat his flesh was at present rotting and decaying. In desperation Jesus urged her to remember their prior

conversation when she had told him she believed that, even now, whatever he was to ask of God, God would grant it! If only she could hang on it was possible for her to see the glory of God even at this late stage!

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, **Said I not unto thee**, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

John 11:38-40

It pained him to see their fear in obeying his request for them to roll the stone away from the tomb. God had not given them that spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7), so the 'vibes' he was catching from the atmosphere were definitely those being administered by his enemy, Satan.

Jesus cried with a loud voice

In an instant he took command of the situation. Anger rose inside him at what Satan had done for, not only had he stripped these two women of their brother, he'd stolen a soul from a race that was only half run. There was still work for Lazarus to do on this earth before he met his Maker.

Jesus' prayer to God seems almost strange for he wasn't asking God for anything, he was just letting everyone in earshot know that he was addressing the God of Israel as his Father and was in direct communication with him. He wanted, with every fibre of his being, for them all to know, and believe, that God had sent him.

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

John 11:41-44

Nothing Jesus ever did was insignificant. There were no 'chance' happenings when he was on the scene. Everything he did was prophesying what would happen in the future and we see here that Jesus acted out prophetically another event which would happen at the end of the age.

This story is so powerful. We miss what is really being related because we just skim over it, reading it as a story instead of delving into each and every word.

Why did Jesus need to cry with a loud voice, or shout, "Lazarus, come forth!"? Could he actually

make his voice so loud that it would physically penetrate through the atmosphere to wherever the souls of men were held until the final judgement? Did he need to shout loud in order to awaken the dead? What was this demonstration all about?

Jesus' whole message was that they were to repent and get ready, for the Kingdom of Heaven was near. Jesus was reaching the end of his ministry on earth and people needed to understand this vital message. He didn't have long. They were still hard hearted and stiff necked, he needed to **be** the prophet.

Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth.

Jerimiah 25:30

By shouting in this manner he was showing the world who he was. He **was** the Lord who would one day descend from heaven, not only with a shout, but also with a mighty fanfare to awaken **all** the dead. This was the reason why he needed to specifically identify Lazarus. If he hadn't every dead person would have come out of their graves. They didn't know whom they were dealing with and he was grieved in the very depths of his heart.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

1 Thessalonians 4:16

Loose him and let him go!

His final words, "Loose him, and let him go!" speak volumes as to how he was feeling at that precise moment. He had sent word to Martha and Mary that this sickness was not unto death. These words were his promise to them, so why? Why? Why had they bound him hand and foot with grave clothes, put him in a tomb, and locked him in there by rolling a great stone in front of the mouth of the cave? Why had they bound & buried him when he'd said this sickness was **not** unto death? What right had they to do this to a man destined to live and bring honour and glory to God? Who gave them the commandment to bury Lazarus? Whose voice were they hearing above God's?

They didn't realise it but they had a lot to answer for. Their sins of unbelief would keep them out of the Kingdom just like it prevented the children of Israel from inheriting the promise to go into the promised land. They had no excuse for their behaviour, they had the law and the prophets to guide them into the right way. The writing of Paul in Romans 1:28 is so true when he said they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, so God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; thus reaping the consequences of their actions.

Brothers and sisters, we are often also guilty of this very sin committed by Martha and Mary. I'm afraid we do not understand that God's ways are not our ways. It is the simplest thing in the world for God to perform miracles and get us out of troubled situations, but that would not help us in the slightest. We would never develop faith or trust.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Unless we allow God to be God and stop leaning to our own understanding, we shall never experience God being our Father. We need to be vulnerable and just put our lives and circumstances into his hands for him to sort out our problems. If he gives us an instruction then he wants us to adhere to what he has said and not act presumptuously when events don't appear to be happening as we think they should. We started off as children, but we so much want independence that we have robbed ourselves of a most wonderful gift – that of being a child of God.

I am reminded of the little girl who was asking her friend how many pennies she had in her hand.

"I've got Five!" said her friend.

"Show me them then!" So her friend opened her hand to display her pennies.

"Oh, you little liar. You've only got 2 pennies in your hand!"

"Well, I've only got 2 pennies now, but my Daddy said that when he comes home from work tonight he's going to give me another 3 pennies. So I do have five pennies!"



17

The Woman Who Got it Right

There is a remarkable story in the Old Testament of a woman who went through an experience very similar to that of Martha and Mary.

In 2 Kings 4:8-37 we read a very dramatic story concerning a Shunammite woman who served God in a practical way by looking after Elisha, the prophet of God, whenever he was in her area. She was the wife of a very wealthy man and decided to use her resources to build Elisha a little extension on the side of her house, and furnish it with certain items that would make him comfortable so that he could come and go at his leisure undisturbed.

Elisha was very grateful for this woman's thoughtfulness and wanted to return her kindness

in some way. He asked his servant, Gehazi, to find out from her what he could do to bless her. Would she like him to speak to the king concerning her, or perhaps to the captain of the army? But she said that this was not necessary as she was well looked after and lived amongst her own people.

It was Gehazi who came up with the solution by telling Elisha that she had been married for a very long time but was still without child, and her husband was now an old man.

"Call her to me," Elisha told him, "I have something to say to her." When she stood in his doorway he said to her, "About this season, according to the time of life, you shall embrace a son."

And she said, "No, my lord, you man of God, do not lie to your handmaid."

I understand completely where she was coming from. There have been many times when people have spoken 'kind words' over me in the guise of a prophetic word, but because they were not from the Lord they didn't materialise. These 'words' or 'prophecies' can be very damaging unless the speaker is actually relating what they have heard from God. Usually, they have the desire to bless and comfort so speak from their own compassion.

But true to Elisha's word she conceived and 9 months later bore a healthy son.

Promise died

After a few years when the child had grown he went out in the field to his father, who was there

with the reapers, complaining that he had a very sore head. His father told one of them to carry the child back to his mother where he would receive attention. The lad sat on his mother's knees until noon whilst she nursed him, and then died.

I think there are very few women who would have acted in the same manner as this woman. Once she had come to realise that her child was dead she acted in a most unusual way. Instead of emotion and despair overwhelming her, and without shedding a single tear she took control of the entire situation. Betraying no sense of panic, she simply made up her mind what she was about to do.

After picking up her child she carried him into the room she had given to Elisha, and laid him out on the bed. Then, locking the door behind her, she went to her husband to ask permission to go, accompanied by one of the young men in his employ on asses, to see the man of God. Her husband was confused, "Why do you need to see the man of God? It's neither a new moon, nor a sabbath, today is not a special day?" Nevertheless, she persuaded him to allow her to go so he gave his consent. The ass being saddled, she instructed the young man to drive as hard and as fast as he could without worrying about her comfort, unless she told him otherwise.

Didn't breath a word

The thing I find so fascinating about this woman is the fact that she didn't breath a word to her husband about the death of their child. He was the

father, it was his right to know. But in this heat he would surely bury the lad without hesitation. Neither did she grieve at the gravity of the situation, but kept her composure. She hid the body from view and took it upon herself to sort out this problem.

She had not asked for this child even though it was her heart's desire to have him. He was given to her by God at the request of Elisha, the man of God, so it was to him that she now ran for another miracle. I am amazed that she regarded Elisha as the person responsible for the well-being of this child. It makes me realise that, because she had been barren, she never forgot that this child was a gift, not a natural result of her marital union with her husband.

She drove as fast as she could to Mount Carmel where Elisha dwelt. Elisha looked and saw them in the distance and exclaimed to his servant, Gehazi, that the Shunammite woman was fast approaching, telling him to run to meet her to find out why she had come. "Ask her if all is well with her? Is it well with her husband? Is it well with the child?" And she simply answered, "It is well," but continued riding.

When she reached Elisha she grabbed hold of him by his feet. Gehazi tried to pull her away, but Elisha restrained him from doing so, saying, "Leave her alone. Her soul is vexed within her and the Lord has hidden the reason, not telling me why she is like this."

It was then that all her pent up emotions burst from her as she cried, "Did I ask you for a son? Didn't I tell you not to deceive me?"

Elisha needed to hear no more, he knew what had happened. The child was dead. He responded quickly,

"Gird up your loins, Gehazi, and take my staff in your hand, and go your way: if you meet any man, don't salute him; and if any salute you, don't answer him: and lay my staff upon the face of the child."

This may have been a wonderful gesture, but for this woman it was not good enough. She hadn't come all this way to commune with the servant – she had come to the Man of God. She had no business with the servant, he had not given her this child. The Man of God gave the gift, the child was his responsibility. With fierce resolve she cried,

"As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you."

She was beyond caring about the appearances of her, a married woman, being in the house of an unmarried man. This was a life or death situation so she wasn't prepared to worry about trivialities. Looking into her eyes he could see that she meant every word she had said. So he arose, and followed her.

Gehazi went on before them and did as instructed thinking that if he did as he obeyed he could handle the problem. Alas there was no reaction from the dead body so he was forced to run back to Elisha and tell him he'd been unsuccessful.

Only God's man will do

The Man of God has got to do what the Man of God has got to do. This was not the time to be training servants in spiritual matters, this was serious stuff. There was a woman here who was hanging

onto **his** coat tails for she recognised his special relationship with God. When you want to reach God, and you don't have a personal relationship with him, the wisest thing to do is get as close as possible to the person whom you think is closest to God – nobody else will do. She knew who to turn to.

So, Elisha went in, shut the door upon himself and the boy, and prayed unto the Lord. During his prayer he was prompted to lay upon the child, put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eyes upon the child's eyes, his hands upon the child's hands: and stretch himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

As he felt the miracle happening beneath his body he got off the child, but after staring briefly, saw there was no movement. He walked to and fro in the room waiting for further instructions from the Lord. He knew he had more work to do but was full of confidence because he had felt the child's body temperature rise. Life was beginning to return. He felt the urge to stretch himself out upon the body again, and this time the child sneezed 7 times, then opened his eyes.

He called Gehazi saying, "Call this Shunammite." When she had come to him he said, "Take up your son." Without a word she went in, fell at his feet bowing herself to the ground, then took up her son and went out. Sometimes words just cannot express the emotions within.

This woman who, like Mary the mother of Jesus, stored everything in her heart and never opened

her mouth, not even to her husband, is not even given a name. But God knows her. She is a very special woman and her witness and testimony will live on throughout eternity because her faith made it possible for her son, this precious gift of God, to live again.

Casting down imaginations

When faced with an impossible situation she didn't embrace negative thoughts. She took control by bringing them all into subjection to what she had initially heard – that was not only the voice of the Man of God, but it was also in the evidence of bearing a son. These were precious signs which she was not going to give up or class as coincidental. Her child had died, yes, but the promise she had been given still lived in her heart. She was so careful to protect that spark of hope in her heart that she wasn't going to share what had happened with anyone other than the Man of God. Nothing was going to put that light out if she had anything to do with it.

She too was in a similar circumstance to Martha and Mary. She lived in the same type of conditions where intense heat would have quickly caused a dead body to decompose. But she would not bury her promise. She refused to accept what she saw with her eyes as truth. God's word to her was truth. Because she had living faith, she received back her living promise, and once again held her son in her arms.

Life after death

We may never experience a literal dead person being brought back to life before our eyes, but I have experienced the resurrection of a dead relationship.

I don't have happy memories of my childhood. I couldn't leave home quickly enough, even though my whole family attended the same church and we all called ourselves 'born again Christians'. At the age of 20, after living on my own for around 4 years, God faced me with what 'Christianity' was all about. He hammered home the fact that I could never hope to be forgiven my sins if I didn't learn to forgive those who had sinned against me. 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us', is taken from the 'Lord's Prayer' which we constantly say parrot fashion. God dealt with me, breaking open my stony heart & transforming my attitude towards my parents. Unfortunately, their hearts must have been harder than mine for there was no crack in theirs.

Time after time I would visit my parents seeking reconciliation but on nearly every occasion the visit would end with either a massive row, or me in frustrated tears. I couldn't make progress. There were no well wishes for my marriage at age 37, and when I sent a Christmas Card, together with a family photograph showing Nathan, my 1st child at 8 days old with Maurice and I, they were returned in the post with a message written on the envelope to say,

"We do not know this person ... return to sender!"

I didn't know what to do. My heart had changed so much. I didn't only want a relationship with my Mum and Dad, I wanted Nathan to have a Gran and Granddad. Only God could give me the answer, so I sought his guidance. It came as a shock, though, when he told me clearly what to do. He said, "I can't heal someone who doesn't want to be healed, but I can raise the dead. Treat your parents as dead, and I will do a miracle!" It took me by surprise, but when God's words had sunk deep into my spirit I realised that I had to have no contact whatsoever with my parents. If they were really dead physically, I would not speak to them either by word of mouth or telephone, neither would I send them cards or gifts for birthdays and special occasions. I would have no contact whatsoever because they would not exist. That was what I had to do now if I was to obey God.

I must confess it was very hard at first for I had a guilty conscience when people asked how my parents were, or whether I had seen them recently, and I admitted I hadn't. But as time went by it got easier and easier for I knew I had heard God.

I waited for the miracle thinking that this would be like the Red Sea opening, or the moon standing still, something absolutely dramatic. But when God actually brought the reconciliation 7 years later, there was no fuss, no fanfare, Mum just strolled back into my life as though there had never been a problem. If I had been hoping for vindication, their requests for forgiveness, or signs of remorse for their ill treatment, then I was hoping in vain. God performed

this miracle so discreetly that it reminded me of the way Jesus told Jairus not to tell anybody what he'd done when he raised his daughter from death to life. Miracles like this are no big deal to God. If he can create the heaven and earth from nothing, why do we consider it a hard thing for the breath of life to come back into a body or spirit again after it has left. Physical, spiritual, emotional death is no problem to God. Where there is no resistance, there is no fight. Our perception of God is really too small.

Well after midnight

I have heard so many preachers say that God will sometimes take us right up to the 11th hour before we receive the help we are seeking in order to prove our faith. But I personally think God delights in answering our prayers well after midnight. God plays his own tune. We might live within boundaries, but God does what he likes. God is not answerable to us – how foolish of us to think like that! No, we are answerable to God!



18

What's 'On Time'?

Faith is what Jesus will be looking for, but will he find it when he returns.! Will he find it in me? Will he find it in you? Our whole future, where the Kingdom of God is concerned, depends on the outcome of that particular question, for without faith it is impossible to please God!

God's best miracles are always performed when we reach the point of impossibility. They wouldn't be regarded as miracles otherwise. Sarah was way past her peak when God revealed to her that she would become a mother. It was a physical impossibility for a 90-year-old woman to have a child. What sort of timing would you call that? But when holding the babe in their arms there was no doubt in either Abraham's or Sarah's minds that this indeed was 'the child of promise' because only a supernatural miracle

could have brought this child into being. The longer the wait, the more astounding the miracle.

Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

Daniel 2:20-22

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Acts 1:7

Western God

For a number of years my husband and I have been travelling to Africa and, to be honest, initially found the lifestyle out there very frustrating. It didn't matter how often we had been given a time when we would be collected for meetings, we would always be ready at least 10 minutes beforehand so that we could just get up and go. Unfortunately, Africans don't operate like this.

There have been numerous occasions when we have been showered and dressed, only to be in need of another shower after sitting in the sweltering heat

for up to 3 hours whilst waiting for our transport to arrive enabling us to get to the various venues we had been booked to preach at. To say we were frustrated would be putting it rather mildly, this was not the way we had been brought up. To us, as British Citizens, this was considered ignorant and insulting behaviour, after all, 'an Englishman's word was his bond!' We believed in keeping our word, being prompt, having integrity when making arrangements, paying attention to detail. What is the point of giving a specific time if you're not going to keep to the clock?

To be blunt, I think many Africans take advantage of this cultural trait and are very inconsiderate of other people. Last time I was in Uganda we were invited to a wedding where 2 couples were scheduled to be married at the same time and Maurice was asked to give a message before the ceremony took place. We arrived promptly, but as hardly anyone was there, we sat in the shade outside the church building waiting for the wedding party to appear. Guests drifted in slowly and then the grooms arrived. We all took our places in the church and waited.

After an hour the first bride arrived and sat down whilst we waited for the second bride to come. Time was ticking by. Maurice and I were scheduled to drive to another town to begin another conference so we had to start the proceedings. As Maurice was drawing to a close of his wedding charge the second bride arrived – she was 3 hours late! How could she not be ready for her own wedding?

Maurice made some comment about the 5 virgins who were ready for the bridegroom and went into the

marriage supper, and the other 5 virgins who were not ready and didn't get in. It was a good practical illustration of the church not being prepared for Jesus when he returns for his bride.

Need the balance

It has taken years for us to get used to 'African Time', in fact we even joke about it now, but I think perhaps there is more merit than I ever realised in this relaxed, laid back attitude. There were no clocks in the days when the Bible was written. Jesus nor the disciples wore a watch! Time was not so minutely detailed.

When Jesus was crucified 'at the 3rd hour' I'm sure the writer didn't mean that he was crucified at 3:00 pm sharp; and when 'at the 9th hour' Jesus cried with a loud voice it didn't mean that specific moment of 9:00 pm precisely (or whatever hours these were referring to). People weren't watching the sundial to make sure that these events happened on the hour, not 5 or 10 minutes either before or after. We, in the West, have become too specific, too detailed, too programmed.

A couple of years ago Maurice and I had been invited to speak in an African church situated in England, U.K., and were quite shocked to see the standard they had adopted to combat the 'African Time' attitude. To one side of the pulpit there was a teleprompter which could only be viewed by the preacher and those on the platform. Everyone who came forward to speak was given an allotted time

allowance and the clock would run down as they talked. As Maurice was preaching I watched the clock finding it to be quite fascinating, but as the time began to run out I was aware of more intensity. Words would flash up ...10 minutes left ...5 minutes left ...4 minutes left ...3 minutes left ...2 minutes left ...1 minute left ...time out! And this '**time out**' shone out in red and would flash on and off to get the preacher's attention.

Maurice would have had to be blind not to see it, and I must confess it was really distracting, but the church leadership felt that this was 'being efficient' and 'well organised', and were proud of their business like approach. Yet, to me, this seemed very wrong. I couldn't see God in it at all.

Bad timing

Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry, even when the situation was desperate. With this incident concerning Lazarus being on the point of death, Jesus sent the message to Martha and Mary telling them not to worry because he would sort the problem out – Lazarus wouldn't die. But then Jesus waited for another 2 days where he was, instead of rushing off to help his friend, knowing how anxious his sisters were. Why no urgency?

Well, the answer to that is – God is in control! God dictates, not our needs! Listen, if God intends to do something you can rest assured **it will be done** and nobody will be able to stop it from happening. God had already told Jesus that he wanted to be glorified,

and for Jesus to be seen as the Son of God, to this end he intended to raise Lazarus from the dead. So Jesus had to remain where he was to allow Lazarus time to fall into the sleep of death, otherwise Jesus wouldn't have been able to wake him up. It wasn't bad timing – **it was God's timing!**

There are many instances in the Bible typifying this timing. Many people have been mystified as to why God would choose to work the way he does.



19

Good Samaritan

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest

more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Luke 10:30-37

In New Testament times Jericho stood some distance to the south-east of the ancient one that Joshua conquered, and was near the opening of the valley of Achor. It was a rich and flourishing town, having a considerable trade, and was celebrated for the palm trees which adorned the plain around it. Jesus visited Jericho on his final journey to Jerusalem.

Priests

Under the Levitical arrangements the office of the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, and to only one family of that tribe, the family of Aaron. Certain laws respecting the qualifications of priests are given in Leviticus. There are ordinances also regarding the priests' dress, and the manner of their consecration to the office in Exodus. Their duties were manifold. They represented the people before God, and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the law.

Levites

The religious right of succession belonging to the firstborn son was conferred on this tribe of Levi,

which was devoted to the service of the sanctuary. They were selected for this purpose because of their zeal for the glory of God and because, as the tribe to which Moses and Aaron belonged, they would naturally stand by the lawgiver in his work. They were not included among the armies of Israel but were reckoned by themselves. They were the special guardians of the tabernacle. As being wholly consecrated to the service of the Lord, they had no territorial possessions. Jehovah was their inheritance and for their support it was ordained that they should receive from the other tribes the tithes of the produce of the land. Thus the Levites were scattered among the tribes to keep alive among them the knowledge and service of God.

Samaritans

In the time of Christ, Western Palestine was divided into 3 provinces, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Samaria occupied the centre of Palestine. It is called in the Talmud the 'land of the Cuthim,' and is not regarded as a part of the Holy Land at all. Therefore, religious feuding festered between the people of these 2 provinces and they would not have dealings with each other. It may be noticed that the distance between Samaria and Jerusalem, the respective capitals of the 2 kingdoms, is only 35 miles in a direct line. On one occasion Jesus needed to pass through Samaria on his way to Galilee, and it was there he met the woman at the well.

And he must needs go through Samaria.

John 4:4

Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

John 4:9

It is surprising, therefore, that Jesus should bring these 3 people into one story to put across a godly principle. Jesus was addressing Jews when he told this story, so each one of them would either imagine themselves, or one of their countrymen, in this position of being beaten and robbed by bandits whilst on their way to do some business deal, Jericho being a trading town. It was what happened regularly on those roads, they were living in dangerous times.

Duty bound

The priest would definitely have been expected to help as they were from the chosen tribe to represent the people before God as intercessors. It would actually be his duty to come to the rescue. What stopped him?

It could be that he was on his way home after fulfilling obligations in Jerusalem and was very tired. Or, perhaps he had an appointment with some official in Jericho and needed to get there as soon as possible, and any delay would have made him late. It was important to have integrity; punctuality was

a virtue! So, no, he couldn't afford to be distracted from his purpose. The man looked too ill to just help him to his feet and send him on his way. This looked like it could take quite a lot of time.

The Levite was an even better choice to help the man as they were scattered among the tribes to keep alive among them the knowledge and service of God. They were known for their zeal for the glory of God and total consecration to the service of the Lord. To this end the other tribes paid them tithes, so that they could perform these duties unhindered with manual labours. These special people were even exempt from having to put their lives on the line when war broke out because of their role in the community. It was more than a duty to help this poor beaten man, it was rather an obligation to care for those providing for his own personal welfare.

But maybe here, again, the Levite was on an errand and was tied to a tight schedule. He was too important a person to be waylaid by tending to one sick man. A whole community could be waiting for him. He needed to get his priorities right. This was a menial task which should be taken care of by somebody who was not so qualified as himself. He couldn't spare the time.

Proffered help stinks!

I've heard this parable preached many times but have never heard anybody talk about how the man who was robbed must have felt. How ironic that the very last person he would have wanted help from

was this stranger who offered it. I'm sure in other circumstances he would not even have deigned to talk with the Samaritan, let alone allow him to touch him. The feuding that went on between these 2 nations was very strong and quite violent. But what choice did he have? Both the priest and the Levite had not only ignored him, but had passed over onto the other side of the road in an attempt to avoid him. He must have been stunned at their behaviour. He was faced with 2 choices – stay here and die, or accept this proffered help – which stank!

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

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

Alighting from his donkey he began to tend the man, pouring oil and wine into the wounds and binding them up. He then lifted him onto his own animal, and turned back to where he had come from in order to place him in an inn where he would

be able to rest. This was really inconvenient. His plans had to be dropped because of an unforeseen situation. He gave the inn-keeper money for his immediate needs telling him that if more was required he would pay the deficit when he returned. He had not just reached out a helping hand, he had made a commitment to look after this Jew until he was well again.

Integrity for this Samaritan also would demand that he ignore the Jew and keep to time, but love always leaves room for the unexpected.

In the words of Richard Wurmbrand, "Love will always lose the prize, according to the law, because love is always beaten in the race. Only evil and vice can make the records. Love is always late."



20

Zacharias

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: **for thy prayer is heard;** and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth

conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.....

Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

Luke 1:5-25 & 57-64

I can feel empathy for a number of people in the Bible. One couple I sympathise with is Zacharias and Elisabeth, two very righteous and godly people. For years they had prayed earnestly for a child. When they first started praying they would have been young, vibrant, in love – wanting their house to be a home, yearning to be a family rather than a couple. I know what that feeling is like. It must have been crushing for them to go year after year without any change in their circumstances, having to put up with the whispers about their relationship with God. To

be barren was considered a curse. Yes, they had to swallow a lot of criticism and wrong judgements.

They had become used to the idea of being childless and thrown themselves into active service for the Lord. The scripture says that they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. You would think that God would bless such a couple.

Well, what we consider to be a blessing, and what God considers to be a blessing, are two different things. For us the blessing would be to have our children when we are young, full of life, having energy to be able to play with and enjoy them. But God decided to bless them when they were old, mature, able to handle the special child God was entrusting them with. The very time when they were well adjusted and ready to enjoy their old age, God crashed in, answering their prayer from years and years ago, with a bundle of life that would certainly bring them joy, but would also bring upheaval and hard, demanding work for two older people. Grandparents enjoy their grandchildren, but they are always grateful to hand them back to the parents after a few hours.

The angel Gabriel brought the message from God to Zacharias believing that he was bearing wonderful news, anticipating that God would be praised.

"Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call him John. And you shall have joy and gladness...!"

Zacharias was so used to his uncluttered life that he was almost affronted that he was being reminded

of his prayers from so long ago. Yes, he had really wanted what he prayed for then, but years had gone by, circumstances had changed, he wasn't hoping any more, time had changed all that. But it was too late ...God had heard the prayer, and decided to answer it in his timing. Gabriel didn't stand any nonsense.

"Who do you think you are talking to, Zacharias? I'm Gabriel, who stands in the presence of Almighty God! Because you don't believe what I'm saying you shall be dumb until you receive the promise!"

Be careful what you earnestly pray for in faith, because if the Lord hears your prayer and decides to grant your request, he may answer when you no longer desire it. And, in fact, could well do without it!

God has a way of making us change our attitude. He doesn't force us to obey, he just makes obedience the easy option. Being in the belly of the whale made Jonah change his attitude towards going to Ninevah as instructed. Being dumb gave Zacharias back his desire for a son! Yes, he certainly glorified God when he'd named him John!



21

Jairus

And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she

felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished

with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

Mark 5:22-43

We need to appreciate what's going on here. We have a scene where Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum, seeks the help of a man who is regarded with great suspicion by the majority of religious leaders at that time.

It appears that whenever Jesus showed up at the synagogue after he had been launched into his ministry, unusual happenings took place. No meeting now seemed mundane. He would leave provocative impressions when reading the scriptures which incited all within earshot, so much so that on one occasion (Luke 4:17-21), they forced him out of the building and took him to the brow of a hill, with the intention of throwing him down from it.

He would cause mayhem by healing the sick (Luke 6:6-8), or casting out devils (Luke 4:33-36), on the sabbath, thus, in the eyes of those watching on, profaning it by 'working'. These actions filled the leaders with madness; and they communed one with another what they might do to get rid of Jesus.

Because of all the religious controversy surrounding Jesus it must have taken courage, born out of great desperation, for Jairus to approach him. Not all the religious leaders feared Jesus. Some of those attending the synagogue really were waiting for the Messiah and serving God in the best way they knew how prior to his return. I believe Jairus was

one such man for he didn't just make his request to Jesus, he actually fell down at his feet whilst begging him to lay his hands on his little girl that she might be healed for she was on the point of death.

When Jesus looked at this man he could discern what was going on. He didn't ask unnecessary questions, he just followed Jairus to his home.

Jesus is waylaid

On the journey Jesus suddenly comes to a halt and starts to look around him. "Who touched my clothes?"

If we had been on site we would have realised, just like the disciples did, that this was a most ridiculous question to ask. Jesus was in the middle of a crowd of people. They were all thronging around **him** because he was the star attraction and they didn't want to miss anything he might have a mind to do. Miracles were taking place wherever he was and everyone wanted to witness one up close with their own eyes. Why was Jesus making such a fuss, what else could he expect amongst all these people? Jesus was persistent.

"Somebody has touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me!" (Luke 8:46).

This was no ordinary touch, and Jesus knew it, for something had drained from his spirit. Life had gone from him into someone else and he wanted to know who had done this, where the life had gone to. This persistent questioning drew the attention of

everyone, they were all looking round in the hope of finding the culprit.

Exposed

Due to the very nature of her sickness, the woman had kept as quiet as possible sneaking into the crowd knowing that if people were to find her there she would be ostracized from their company as she was considered 'unclean'.

For 12 long years her life had been draining away with this terrible internal bleeding, it was like permanently being on her menstrual cycle. In her culture menstruating women were considered 'unclean' and were not allowed to touch anything, or prepare food for others, as in doing so she would make them 'unclean'. She had done everything within her own power to alter the situation, spending everything she had on physicians and doctors, but instead of getting better she had gradually become worse. All she had wanted to do was just touch his coat. She didn't want him to see her, or put his hand on her, she just wanted to be hidden by the crowd and get one sneaky touch whilst nobody was looking, whilst nobody realised it was her hiding beneath her veil. She reached out her hand, took hold of his coat, and in an instant felt the miraculous healing power of God go through her body and she knew that she was healed. What a euphoric moment! How her heart must have been singing in that instant. She had felt the touch of Almighty God!

All she wanted now was to drift off through the crowd back to the solitude of her own home where

she could pour out her heart in praise to God. But Jesus wouldn't stop asking questions! This exposure was the very last thing she had wanted, and you would think that Jesus, being in such direct communication with God, would have known this. But virtue had left him. His garment had been touched by an 'unclean' woman, his garment which was covering his body was unclean, he felt the uncleanness and wanted to know who had caused this.

At last, a terrified woman came forward to 'confess' her sins. She felt she couldn't hide any longer in the crowd for guilt caused her heart to beat wildly and her face to redden and glow with embarrassment. She fell at his feet and told him everything. Yes, everyone heard her 'confession'.

How Jesus' heart must have sung. This was why he came, to find faith in God from the people of God. This woman had so much faith that she was prepared to sneak in not only uninvited, but unwanted, so that she could touch God's man. With love filled eyes he told her to go in peace, her faith had earned it.

Jairus left dangling

It's at times like these that we find our faith faulting because we feel that God has lost interest in us, and is being diverted towards another need more important than ours. What had just happened was wonderful, yes, but as far as Jairus was concerned, it was taking up precious time. Time he didn't have, for his situation was even more desperate than that of

this unclean woman. His daughter was on the very verge of death but Jesus hadn't caught the urgency of his plight. At the very moment Jesus had been commending this woman for her faith, members of his household had come to speak with him.

Past midnight - again!

"Jairus, it's too late. Your daughter is dead! Don't trouble the Master any longer, there's nothing more he can do now."

When reading this I could almost feel the turmoil Jairus would have been going through. Their words must have been like hammer blows to his bewildered mind. Why, oh why, did that woman have to turn up to delay Jesus coming home with him? One person in that crowd would definitely not have been rejoicing in the miracle that had just been witnessed for it had stolen his daughter's opportunity for life.

Jesus took one look at Jairus and could see his whole demeanour slump in defeat. His heart reached out to him in compassion. "Don't fear, Jairus, even now I can still help. Just keep believing."

It was a completely different scenario now. Jesus hadn't minded the crowd following before, but the situation had changed and he couldn't have onlookers on this errand. He wouldn't permit any to follow other than Peter, James, and John, his trusted disciples. When they arrived at Jairus' house he was met with the mourners and wailers making a commotion.

"Why are you all making this ado and weeping? The girl's not dead, she's just sleeping!"

They ridiculed him, of course, scornfully laughing at him. But is it possible that they really had mistaken her state as being death when in actual fact she was just in a deep sleep – a coma?

I have recently returned from Uganda where I saw a young woman who had only just recovered from a poisonous snake bite. Apparently the venom is so powerful from this particular snake that it renders the victim completely paralysed after a matter of only 2 hours. Indeed, many of these victims have been buried alive because the observers didn't realise their brain had gone into a very deep sleep. It has now become a ruling that, only after a doctor who has done a proper examination, can someone be pronounced dead after a snake bite.

I, personally, believe that this girl was dead, but one thing is certain, Jesus allowed them all to believe that wasn't necessarily the case at all. Even when he had done the miracle of bringing her back to life he instructed her parents not to tell anybody what he had done. This miracle took place behind closed doors because the time hadn't yet come for him to reveal who he was.

Just a thought

Perhaps, I say, just perhaps, the very fact that Jesus arrived later than expected to perform these miracles of raising the dead was simply prophetic of the fact that nobody knows the day or hour when the Son of

Man will return to this earth with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the hosts of heaven. There are so many warnings in scripture about being careful not to allow ourselves to slip back into a wasteful, carnal lifestyle because he is delaying his coming.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, **My lord delayeth his coming**; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:42-51

Luke adds more of what Jesus said at the end of his rendering of this account which should make us think more soberly of how we should behave whilst waiting for our Messiah to return.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Luke 12:47-48

When it was reported by his own personal disciples that Jesus had raised someone from the dead, John the Baptist's mind started racing. He brought to mind the prophecies and immediately thought that this could be the Christ.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And **this rumour of him** went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about. And **the disciples of John shewed him of all these things**. And John calling unto him two of his

disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, **Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?**

Luke 7:12-19

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

1 Thessalonians 4:16



22

Love Is Always Late

Let's take a look at some of the people mentioned in the Bible who waited for their promises to be fulfilled.

Noah

Noah was told to build an ark because God was going to destroy the earth but save him, and those who believed with him, from the judgement to come. He and his sons set to work and were building for 100 years, witnessing at first hand the terrible things which were taking place day after day. God had to put up with the debauchery, the idol worship, the demonic activity. It is written that God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and it repented him that he had ever made man. How bad could it possibly get? But there eventually came a

day when God told Noah to get into the ark. God shut the door upon Noah and his family, yet they still remained there for another 7 days. How did they feel whilst cooped up with all the animals?

Time goes very slowly when you have not been given a specific reference in time to focus on. They had no idea how long this ordeal would last, they just had to rely on what God had told them and trust that they would be able to cope with the pressure. We see from hindsight that they came through their trial.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Hebrews 11:7

Abraham

Abraham is the classic example. Indeed, he is given the awesome title 'Father of Faith'. God gave Abraham so many promises. Looking for a city whose builder and maker was God, he was told that his peculiar, special seed would be like the sand of the sea, like the stars in the heavens. Yet when he died at the age of 175 he was living in tents with just 2 of the promised offspring. Isaac was 40 years old before Rebekah bore him twin boys, and that was the only pregnancy she ever had.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an

inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

Sarah

His wife, Sarah, believed that God was going to give Abraham a son and initially thought it would be through her womb. But after years of being barren and coming into menopause she offered her handmaid to fulfill this role and Ishmael was born. 13 Years later, all hope of bearing her own child was dead. However, her prayers were answered and God blessed her. At the age of 80, God gave her the strength to conceive and she bore Abraham the long awaited child of promise. Sarah waited longer than any woman I know to receive a promise from God. And she only saw the beginning of the promise, she didn't see what Abraham and herself were hoping to see. Like Abraham, she died in faith not having received the promise. She is a wonderful example of faith.

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

Hebrews 11:11

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

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Hebrews 11:13-40

It is encouraging to look at the people who left their mark on history, people who caught God's attention. They were all just ordinary people like you and me, just flesh and blood. But they had a

conviction that God could be trusted. If we want God to answer our prayers, then we need to not only pray in faith, but wait patiently in faith, allowing him the freedom to answer in his own time.

We have no excuse, we are surrounded by a host of witnesses that God is faithful and can be trusted. What God is looking for are people whom he can trust. People who will believe in him and love him no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the delay. People whose love will not grow cold and turn to bitterness or anger. We need to know whether we truly love God or are just infatuated by the thought of a relationship with him. Only adversity will prove what we have – to us, and to God.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Hebrews 12:1-3



23

Can I Make Amends?

If you have been looking at your own responses to God's promises whilst reading this book there will probably be times in your life when you know you have not hung on in faith and simply given up. It's OK to read about the heroes who got it right, but what happened to those in the Bible who got it wrong?

Children of Israel

When God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt he did it by showing his might and power. He championed them with awe inspiring wonders that had never been seen before or since, to the point

where he not only opened the Red Sea enabling all 2-3 million of them to cross on dry land but, when rolling the waves back, he also drowned the whole Egyptian army who were in pursuit of them. They had not only been delivered, now they had nobody chasing them. All their enemies had been destroyed.

After travelling through the desert sustained supernaturally on manna, quails, and the water which God made gush from the rocks, they came to their destination – Canaan, the promised land. This was what they had been waiting for. They had been promised a land flowing with milk and honey, and after 40 days when the 12 spies who had been sent to scout the land came back bearing a bunch of grapes which were so large they had to be carried on a pole between 2 men, they all marvelled. How lush was that? Two of the spies brought a marvellous report of what they had seen. The land was everything God had promised. They could bring their children up in freedom and never again go hungry or afraid. Yes, they would have a wonderful future living in this place.

The problem was that the 10 other spies told a different story. Instead of enthusing over the benefits, they fed the people with tales of giants who lived in the land and would fight to defend their territory. The Israelites looked like grasshoppers compared to these inhabitants. If they tried to invade they would all end up as dead men.

The people listening on, hearing both reports, began to get frightened. They had been slaves for 400 years, living in dread of their Egyptian taskmasters.

They had been freed from Egypt, but Egypt wasn't out of them. They had witnessed with their own eyes the miracles and wonders which God had performed to free them and would have been delighted if God were to carry on with his wonders, just handing them Canaan on a plate. But the thought of fighting to inherit the promise filled them with dread. Even though Moses stressed that they would not be on their own, God would be with them, fighting for them, they moaned and murmured to the point of saying that they wished they'd never come out of Egypt.

Their words made God angry. He was so angry at their reaction that he vowed they would never see what he had prepared for them. In fact they would wander in the desert a year for every day the spies had been scouting the land – 40 years – until every unbeliever died. Their children would inherit, but those who had murmured and complained never would.

The Israelites were shocked that God would turn on them like this and tried to make amends by going to war with the Canaanites. But it was too late, God had made up his mind, and the Canaanites slaughtered many chasing them away from their doors. It's a fearful thing to invoke the anger of the Lord, and the Israelites had made a very big mistake.

In Revelation we are clearly told that the fearful and unbelieving will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the

fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Revelation 21:7-8

Does God deal this way with everybody? God is not like us in the way he acts. His thoughts are not our thoughts, his ways are not our ways. The sooner we learn that the better. God hates, with a very awful abhorrence, fear, doubt, and unbelief. Grief and pain are no excuse for making us lose faith in God thus treating him like a commodity. "Be nice to me God and I'll be nice to you!" To lose faith in God because he doesn't give us what we want is a very dangerous game to play, for one day **every** knee shall bow and **every** tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Mary

I can't, however, finish this book letting you think that I have dismissed Mary as being a woman ruled only by her emotions, who could love Jesus one day and hate him the next depending upon how he treated her. She, like each one of us, was on a journey and needed a real encounter with God. She had to realise that Jesus was no ordinary man, he was acting under instructions with the specific purpose of showing the world what God was like.

On the day Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead she was truly exposed. She hadn't realised that Jesus

had power over life and death, no idea that what he said would always come to pass no matter what the opposition. Neither did she realise how her words had cut into him. The account in John made it clear that Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. What he felt for them was more than a casual relationship, he was involved. He must have enjoyed their company as much as they enjoyed his, so when she spoke to him in that accusing way it must have cut him to the quick and broken his heart. She had expected to see him shed tears because he was mourning the death of Lazarus, but it was quite a revelation to see his tears were on account of her words.

I know this incident must have left her feeling terribly depressed instead of elated. Why do I think that? Well, you only have to read the next chapter of John to realise what effect it had on her.

Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the

bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

John 12:1-8

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

Mark 14:3-9

The wastefulness of love

Simon the leper had made Jesus a supper and invited special guests. Lazarus was one that sat at the table with Jesus whilst Martha was fulfilling her usual role and serving. Mary was apparently shirking

her duties yet again but she couldn't let this moment pass. She didn't know it then, but in 6 days Jesus would be crucified, and what she was about to do was because she was being moved by the Holy Spirit.

With a heavy heart, full of regret for the pain she had caused her dearest friend, she entered the room with an alabaster box containing ointment of spikenard which was very precious and poured it on his head, and on his feet. She didn't care what part of his body it touched she just wanted to lavish her apology on him. It was all she could think of doing to show him how sorry she was for what she'd put him through. This incident is reported in 2 gospels. John says she poured the ointment on Jesus' feet, Mark says it was on his head. They are both right, they are just emphasising what came out to them as they watched.

It's hard to credit that this beautiful gesture could bring criticism from one of Jesus' own disciples because in his eyes she had wasted something which was very costly. It could have been sold for 300 pence, which was the equivalent of a whole years wage (some people worked a whole day for just 1 penny), and given to the poor. Jesus immediately defended Mary telling them to leave her alone, she had performed a good work on him. This offering given from a contrite heart was well pleasing in his sight. She was making amends and cleansing her soul.

Jesus understood exactly what she was doing. He loved and appreciated her act for he knew she was sacrificing the most precious thing she had in order to let him know that, if she could, she would do

anything to take back her hurtful words and attitude towards him. She didn't use this ointment to embalm Lazarus's dead body, it was probably being saved for somebody very special such as her future husband, or even for herself. In breaking this alabaster box and allowing its contents to be poured on Jesus, she was breaking open and pouring out her heart. Words come easily It's one thing to say we are sorry, but it's entirely different when we do something practical to make amends. Works of repentance soften the heart of those who are offended like nothing else. Because of what she gave, Jesus said that whenever this gospel of the Kingdom of God should be preached in the whole world, what she did would be spoken of for a memorial of her. Why is that? Because it's important for us to know that we may have made a mess and caused Jesus much distress and pain; it may be well past midnight because God has been waiting longer than he should have done for our repentant apology, but while there is still breath in our body it is never too late to make things right between ourselves and God. Making amends will come at a sacrificial cost to any individual. He who has been forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47), and Mary bears witness to that.

Zacchaeus

So also does Zacchaeus, the little man whom everybody hated. This stooge of the Roman government who, being employed to collect taxes, would mercilessly legally rob his own countrymen

in order to line his own pockets. When it came to careers, tax collectors were the lowest of the low, and friendless, throwing into prison anyone who would not pay what he demanded.

He appeared to care nothing for what people thought of him, being tough and hard as nails on his exterior, but on the inside he was just like everyone else – looking for love and acceptance. He would never have had the gall to invite Jesus to his home for dinner. Jesus was way out of his class. He got the shock of his life when, hiding in a tree because he was too small to get a good view from ground level, Jesus looked up at him – yes, specifically at him – and told him that he would be dining with him that very evening.

Jesus was the most famous man in Israel! It would be like Madonna, or Michael Jackson pointing you out at a concert and saying that they were going to spend the evening with you. Not that I'm putting Jesus in the same category as these people, of course. I'm merely pointing out that everybody knew who Jesus was, just like everybody, no matter what their age, would know today who Madonna and Michael Jackson were. This was a really big deal!

Little Zacchaeus was so overwhelmed that he threw a lavish dinner and received Jesus and his disciples joyfully. He knew that the people who had seen Jesus going into his house would be shocked, saying that Jesus had gone to be guest with a man who was a sinner, but that made it all the more special. He was beside himself with gratitude for this tremendous honour, so much so that he said to Jesus...

Can I Make Amends?

...Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 19:8-10

I can just imagine Jesus and his disciples laughing and enjoying this scene. Following his Father's instructions he had given this scoundrel a little personal attention, something which he must have been starved of for a very long time, and his whole attitude changed. When faced with the love of God the worst of sinners can flip and become a most glorious saint. Look at the change that took place in Saul, who later became known as Paul the apostle.

God knows what is in the depth of our hearts. He sees the hurt, the pain, the rejection, the longing to be forgiven and loved. Our problem is that we don't think we are of any value to God. We run ourselves down believing the lies Satan feeds us that we've made too much of a mess to ever make amends.

When will you start trusting God more than Satan? When will you realise that Satan is the father of lies? All Satan wants to do is rob, steal and destroy. He doesn't want us to take part in the Millennial reign of Christ when he returns to this earth; neither does he want us to have eternal life, and share all the benefits God has prepared in the new Heaven and Earth he will create for those who love him. These

benefits are there for the taking, but unbelief will stop you from receiving them. All we have to do is believe what God says and turn to him in faith. You're not sure you have faith? No problem, you can prove to God and yourself whether you have faith. Do something to please him. All the disciples knew that words were not good enough, there needed to be actions to accompany them. Show God, by the way you live and the things you do, what you believe.

Yea, a man may say, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

James 2:18

Let us strive to be noticed by God. Remember, without faith it is impossible to please him.

Don't put God in a box

Our clock may stop at midnight, but God isn't ruled by our timing – he lives in eternity. We must never be foolish enough to presume to put Almighty God in a 'time box'!



Epilouge

by Maurice Barratt

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. ...**For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.**

Hebrews 11:8-10

Abraham, who was the Father of Faith, must have had a promise of God far beyond what he would see in his lifetime. He was actually looking for the New Jerusalem that we read about in the book of Revelation – and this prophecy has not even come to pass in our generation as of yet. This was the city that God would build. It is the city that will last throughout eternity on the New Earth.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:2

Whether we think that Abraham expected it to be fulfilled before he died, or not, is only speculation, but we do know that he died in faith not having received the promise from God. Did God fail Abraham because he did not see the promise fulfilled? Certainly not, for God will surely fulfil it, and Abraham will rejoice to see it.

Joanna has written a book about God fulfilling his promises to people, after the time to be fulfilled 'in their eyes', has past. This is an important principle that Christians should take note of and understand. God never, ever fails to keep his promise if we stay in faith. Unbelief can stop the process, of course, and God often changed his mind and didn't do what he had promised because of this. When Israel refused to go into the promised land after 40 years in the wilderness, because of unbelief, God told them that they would die in the wilderness and they would all know his 'breach of promise' – a term we borrowed from this incident, for our legal system, and still use today.

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my **breach of promise**

Numbers 14:34

In my daily reading, just recently (May 2013), I have been looking at the book of Leviticus and the sacrifices and ordinances concerning uncleanness. It talks about bringing a sacrifice after deliverance from sickness or uncleanness on the eighth day. 7 days were for separation, and on the 8th day they were free from their trial. In reality there is not an 8th day for it is the beginning of a new week. The 7th day is the completion of a whole week, and then the week starts again, so whenever the bible talks about the 8th day it signifies the new beginning, or the start of endless life – eternity. Again this is teaching us the principle that even when the week is finished and the end has come, there is life after death and there is light after darkness. There is deliverance after defeat and hopelessness, there is always an 8th day.

I know personally, many people, who have had terminal illnesses and told me they had a word from God that they would not die, but have a great testimony. One of them was actually writing a book during the illness about her trial and said she would finish it, after her miraculous healing, as a wonderful testimony to God and fulfilment of his promise. This person died and was buried. What happened to the promise? All those around this person were 'believing in faith' so what was their reaction afterwards? There are only 3 possible conclusions for an honest person and they are: **1.** God did not keep his promise. **2.** They did not hear God is the first place. **3.** Their faith failed.

Joanna and I have been learning this principle for many years now and I would like to add a personal

testimony showing, and supporting, this principle that Joanna has written about in this book.

A few years ago the colour printer that we used in the ministry for printing the book covers and other publications, came to the end of its life. It was not a cheap machine and cost over £4,000 when purchased. We had no available money to buy a new one and the jobs were building up to a place where we had to do something, because some of the jobs were for other people and I did not want to let them down.

We had our usual fellowship meeting at Barratt Ministries and I shared the need with those present and asked them to pray that God would send us the money to purchase a new machine. I told them the specific amount we needed and a brother prayed in bold faith that 'it was a need and not a greed' and that we would all believe in faith that the money would come within one week.

After the 7 days no money had come into the ministry. The next day I was driving to a house group where I was teaching in a town an hour's drive away, and the man who had been at the fellowship and believed with the rest of us that the money would come was driving me to this town. In our conversations he asked if God had sent the money as the 7 days were completed. When I told him, not a penny had come into the ministry, he said, "Oh well, that's it then!" I had to tell him that I have a principle that if I believe something in the beginning then I will believe it to the end, and die in faith if necessary. I shared that I will not play games by wondering if I really heard God, or bring the devil into the equation

by saying he was stopping it. I told him that I still believed God even if, in the natural realm, it could not be fulfilled – according to the prayer that it would come within 7 days.

I received a phone call, 2 days later, from a business man in another county. I had not spoken to him for a couple of years. He asked if the ministry was all right and I said it was fine – I try not to tell people my needs, and at the time of the phone call I was not, for one minute, thinking this man had been spoken to by God about my specific need. He asked me again and I said that in some areas we were struggling. He then said that 3 days ago he was woken up in the night and God told him to send Barratt Ministries some money. He apologised for not ringing me straight away, and said it would be in the post that day.

The cheque came 4 days after the 7 days we had asked for and it was the exact amount needed to purchase the new machine. God had answered the prayer and on the 7th day had instructed the man to send us the money. The man was busy, and I am sure it was God's plan to test our faith to believe that even after midnight, the miracle can come and God's word can be fulfilled in a wonderful way. Of course the driver learned a vital principle when he later heard the story.

If we do not have these testimonies how can we encourage others to have faith? We must live in reality and not in our doctrines or mind games. Faith is a serious business, and not to be played with, so bringing God into disrepute

I pray that you have read this book with an open mind and will start, or continue, to really believe God for the impossible and unbelievable. Even if the promise is dead, **do not bury it**. There is hope even after the end.

Be an 8th day Christian and see God do above and beyond what is impossible to man.

Maurice Barratt

BOOKS BY JOANNA BARRATT:

This is the second book on faith by Joanna

In this book, Joanna traces the steps Abraham took which earned him the respect of Almighty God, who called him his 'friend'. We can all learn from his lifestyle if we also want to be 'children of Abraham'. Joanna looks at Abraham and Sarah in a different way than most people, and this refreshing glimpse into their lives will challenge and encourage you.

Play The Man: What women look for in men

We know what a man looks for in a woman - vivacious, voluptuous, and very often blonde - but what attracts a woman? Joanna shares honestly from her experience, both as a single and a married woman, what she feels women are looking for in their men. This book is full of insight and biblical revelation. Every man should read it!

ISBN 1-904592-08-2

Experiences From Life

The Sermon on the Mount is the manifesto Jesus gave his disciples regarding the lifestyle he expected his disciples to adopt. Joanna's husband, Maurice Barratt, has 60-1 hour teachings covering this passage of scripture. Each chapter of Joanna's book starts with a précis of Maurice's respective teaching followed by what happened when she attempted to put it into practice. She is really honest and shares her trials, and failures, and shows how God used it to change her character. This volume covers Matthew 5:1-12.

ISBN 1-904592-15-5

Learning from life

This second book in the the trilogy. Inspiring, practical, sometimes funny, but always challenging! Taking a practical look at the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5:13-6:32.

ISBN 1-904592-20-1

Lessons from Life

In this third and final book in the trilogy, Joanna continues with her unique style, and covers the remaining verses from Matthew 6:24 to the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

ISBN 1-56592-197-6

The Power of Women

Women have a power that transcends both the physical and mental realms. The heart of a woman is so different from that of a man, and she is able to have tremendous influence and input into a man's destiny. Joanna illustrates from the bible, and her own colourful life, just how powerful women can be. A godly woman is a wonderful asset to further the man to fulfil God's will in his life, but an ungodly woman can bring down mighty, strong, men, and ruin their god-given purpose.

ISBN 978-1-904592-56-3

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like ...

Jesus told many parables, and Joanna looks at them in a new light, and as usual shares her experiences as illustrations of what Jesus really meant by them. Expect to have your views on the kingdom, and the parables, challenged as you read this revealing look at the kingdom of heaven and the future rewards, and sometimes dire consequences, for the followers of Jesus.

ISBN 978-1-904592-67-9

All books are available from
[www. amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk),
www.barrattministries.org.uk
Tel. 0161 224 2620