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from *Life*

*Joanna Barratt*

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## **LESSONS FROM LIFE**

by Joanna Barratt

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# Preface

Grace is not something that we feel, it is something we demonstrate. We are not saved by grace. The bible says that we are saved by grace **through faith**, and faith is the evidence and substance of our belief. In other words faith is provable by our actions. Grace without faith (actions) is not grace at all and a life that does not slowly demonstrate the life of Christ in, and through, our mortal body is a life lived without grace.

I have known Joanna from when she was a rebellious schoolgirl with a murderous spirit, to the submissive and loving mother and wife that she is today. As her husband I see all of her faults and imperfections, and yet I can testify to the grace of God working in her life.

This book, the last in the Sermon on the Mount series, will reveal more of her imperfections and failings, but will also show her obedience, faithfulness and submission to God. As always she is brutally honest in her writings and doesn't spare herself ( and sometimes her husband) but I believe the life of Christ will shine through these pages as you read of her pain, her joys, trials and blessings.

## *Preface*

When Joanna visited the many prisons in England and Scotland a few years ago and shared her testimony with the prisoners, the thing that surprised them the most was that after all the violence and pain of her childhood, she didn't look like a person who had been through the experiences that she had just described to them. Their own words were "You have no scars".

They used to look into her eyes, amazed that hers were soft and transparent. The prisoners recognised God's grace even though they used different terms for it.

Thank God the scars have gone, and our three children only know a woman of grace and not violence. I can truly thank God that I have a meek wife and not a Jezebel.

Maurice Barratt



The two great influences in my life. Pastor Bill Barratt above and my husband, Maurice, his son, below.





Challenge Issue 42  
Take no thought for your life  
Matthew 6-24-25

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus deals with 2 root problems in Christian's lives: hypocrisy and covetousness. Satan has no direct access to our hearts. Neither do we. We can't control or change our motives but we can make conscious decisions to think in a certain way. The reason Christians don't change is because they are not willing to alter the way they think.

Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind . A disciple can't be covetous of money, the love of which is the root of all evil. Their lifestyle (which comes from how they think) must prove that they have only one master. When Jesus says, "Take no thought for your life," he is talking about the self life, our own life, our independence, what we want for ourselves. Jesus contrasts this 'self' life with 'the life' - the spiritual life which is the source and fount of our relationship with God.

This life shines through when the self life is at its lowest ebb. In persecution, suffering and great distress, the life of Jesus seems to shine all the more brightly.

We have to consciously deal with covetousness when we spot it in our own lives. People can spend hours browsing through catalogues looking at fashion, kitchens, power tools, cars, computers ... Teasing themselves with things they can't afford. Renew your mind and "take no thought for your life". We serve our own lives and are covetous, or we serve Christ and are content.

# 1

## *Take No Thought - Easier Said Than Done*

We had just arrived at the Conference Centre and received the keys to our accommodation. This would be the very first time my husband and I had taken all 3 children with us. We had talked about and settled on the sleeping arrangements beforehand to ensure that I could get the best sleep possible as, for coming up to 8 years, I had been consistently subjected to broken sleep with the children. Maurice and I had been to the Conference Centre a couple of times previously and had always been accommodated in a spacious twin bedded room with én-suite bathroom. I had planned for Nathan, the eldest boy, to take up the extra bed in my bedroom, and Maurice to be in an identical bedroom next door to mine with Izaak (who snored like a trouper and had an internal body clock which demanded he awoke every morning at around 6 a.m.) and Tamar, who

as yet was still in a cot. All went well until we turned the keys in the locks which opened the doors to the rooms and found the layout to be completely different to what I had expected.

## Not what I expected

It didn't matter to me that we had been housed in a different block than was usual, but these rooms had double beds instead of twin single beds, with only a shower and no bath. The rooms were so small that when the cot was put at the bottom of the bed we had to really breath in to get past it to get to the other side of the bed. My family were going to be here for 4 days and all I could think about was how Tamar would be inconvenienced with nowhere to play, and nowhere to have a bath. I talked with the staff and did my utmost to change into different accommodation, but the block we normally booked at the Conference Centre had been taken up by another group who were also using the facilities.

## The final straw

The final straw to break the camel's back came when Maurice told me he couldn't believe how negative I had become, as it seemed to him I was finding problems everywhere. I walked out of the room in disgust. How on earth could he know how I felt? The children were my responsibility, and it was always left to me to work things out.

That very evening, at the first Conference meeting, Maurice was approached by the organisers and asked

if he and I would take part in the next meeting which was to be held the following morning.

I was quite bleary eyed when I arrived at the meeting next morning. I felt as though I'd done a few rounds in the boxing ring with Mohammed Ali during the night. I had been convinced in my mind that I had taken the easiest option having Nathan rather than one of the other children with me, but I had not anticipated any of the kicks or punches he threw at me, and I really wasn't in a very good mood. My fears about the change in plan for sleeping arrangement had been confirmed. Nevertheless, God does not pity the flesh, and he doesn't expect us to either! Especially our own!

### Stronger after the trials

Before Maurice and I were due to speak a couple of people got up to give brief testimonies. The thing that God highlighted to me was that, whether sickness or dire circumstances had struck, these people had carried on regardless and come through to be much stronger Christians after their trials. We had also sung the chorus, 'Let the Bride of the Lamb say, "Come Lord Jesus",' at 3 different intervals before Maurice was to bring the message and I was feeling extremely uncomfortable. What on earth would Jesus see in me if He did come back for His Bride - today? In those few brief minutes I looked back over my life and was shocked to see just how negative I had really had become, and I tried to trace it back to its source.

I remember my mother saying to me on the very day I left home “you’ll be back!” with such conviction and threat, that I said to myself, with the same inner conviction, “Never!” And I never did go back to live with them, no matter how financially tight and difficult things got.

I managed, and made the best of everything, even my poverty, and never let anyone know just how destitute I was. I was very proud and positive - I *would* make it. And I did. I threw myself into the church and Christianity. I got up early every morning to spend 2 hours with God before leaving for work. I went on solitary retreats so that I could spend my days and nights fasting and praying.

I knew how to fight

Because my parents had taught me to fight and how not to take no for an answer, my determination and strength of will was of course put to good use. I found life had become exciting, and the more problems I encountered and overcame, proved to me that if I put my mind to it I could do anything. Even when I was 5 months pregnant with my first child and was travelling through Poland on a ministry trip with my husband, the fact that we had no money for food or accommodation didn’t bother me in the slightest, and it was my suggestion that we slept in the car, even though I woke up aching all over. So what had happened? Why was it I had become so negative?

I think that maybe for the first time in that meeting I realised that everything I had done for the Lord had

not been done with His strength, but with my own. That's the problem with strong, tough people, they can manage fine, even doing God's work, in their own strength. But the bible specifically states that we can do all things *through Christ* who strengthens us. All I was seeing now was the real me, the me when faced with the responsibility of having dependants to take care of instead of just myself. I now understood why God had given me children so late in life. He had to break me somehow and make me know just how vulnerable Joanna Barratt really was. How kind he is to try me whilst mingling it with the wonderful blessing of being a mother.

## Weaknesses - not me

I honestly wasn't aware of this weakness I had. I had done my best to take so many active measures to ensure that I was putting my trust in God. We did not practice birth control. When each of my children had been born I had adamantly refused to allow them to be vaccinated, even though the doctors did their best to 'make me see sense' and educate me with the problems I could be bringing on myself and my children by taking this stance. We had cancelled all insurance for everything other than a third party policy for the car which is compulsory. We had no alarms on the house or car, we lived by faith and sent our children to a Christian School instead of giving them a free education in a state school, even though we had to find thousands of pounds each term for this privilege.

As I sat there in the meeting I reflected on how often I had panicked when my children had seemed ill, and how readily I had run to the doctor for help. Often the doctors would just end up putting my mind at rest, saying that I was perhaps over reacting because I was tired and stressed at having 3 young children to cope with. But that was not the truth. In my mind and heart I knew that I could trust God. I had the deep conviction that nothing could happen to me, my husband, my children, my home, anything, unless God allowed it.

## Practicing what we preach

As a household we had given our lives to God and with all our hearts endeavoured to put into practice what Jesus said, “take no thought for your life.” We can accept so easily these words, but living this out practically can be, and is, totally different. Truth is truth. Trust is trust. Faith is faith. God can only prove what is truth in us by allowing circumstances which will expose the truth. Our stay at the Conference Centre showed I had failed this test, but to my advantage. With God’s help I could change. There’s always room for change, it’s just embarrassing when you find that it’s your own testimony that trips you up. But that’s OK.

In the society we live in we have absolutely no excuse for being negative about anything. As a family we personally sponsor a little girl in Guatemala through 'Adopt-a-Child' which is run by some good friends of ours. On their programme she is fed twice a week and given dental and medical attention. She and

her 2 brothers live with their mother, stepfather and grandmother, who find it very difficult to make ends meet each week. The meals provided by this programme save the children from being so malnourished that they have to sell their bodies in order to provide the small amounts of food they need to survive.

## No right to complain

Over the past 3 years Maurice and I have been visiting 3rd world countries - India, Nigeria, Uganda - and have had our eyes opened to what others have to put up with on a daily basis. We are so blessed that God has allowed us to live in the West. We complain about so much, but we have no right to. We have street lighting, sanitation, a clean environment, order on the roads, a police force, social security ... I could go on and on with this point! And I have determined, after seeing for myself how these people live, never again to complain about any adverse circumstances I could possibly find myself in.

I think also of our brothers and sisters in the faith who are currently being persecuted by family and governments alike because they love Christ and have literally taken up their cross to serve him. These people are putting into practice the exhortation Jesus gave of taking no thought for their life, they are trusting God to do with them what he wants, and take care of them through their trials and circumstances.

Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, the 3 friends of Daniel in the Old Testament, had this same attitude.

They knew what they had to do - serve and worship God alone and not bow down to any idols. When faced with the threat of the fiery furnace they didn't back down, they refused to submit to pressure, not because they were convinced that God would not allow them to come to any harm. On the contrary, they knew for sure that God was able to deliver them if he so desired, but even if he didn't want to, they still would not bow to any other god.

### Slowly getting there

I don't know how God will perfect my heart to get me to that state where I can say like these 3 spiritual giants that no matter what I am faced with I will trust God in all circumstances, but I am encouraged because God is still at work in me, exposing areas which haven't as yet been yielded to him. It's *easier* said than done, but even though it can be very costly and sometimes painful to our flesh, it's far better to *do* it than *say* it. And the outcome of this kind of obedience brings peace and joy.



At the beginning of my phase of anorexia - and I still thought I was fat!



Challenge Issue 43  
Take no thought for food  
Matthew 6:25-26

Sodom was a very wicked city, but that wickedness was the consequence of a root ... "Behold, this was the iniquity of they sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread and abundance of idleness ... Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49). No mention of homosexuality and violence. Those were the consequences. The root causes were indulgent eating, luxurious materialism, and excess leisure time. We see the exact same roots in Western society today - with the exact same consequences.

Paul knew that food offered to idols wouldn't defile the heart, and Daniel knew it too. But Daniel also knew that covetousness, the desire for rich food, luxury, status and privilege, would defile the heart. Given the opportunity to live luxuriously and indulgently, he refused and deliberately asked for a simple lifestyle. It's not rich food that's wrong, it's the desires of the heart which makes us crave these things. Jesus said that what goes into our mouth doesn't defile us, it's what come out because what goes in cannot touch the heart, but what comes out reveals what is in the heart.

## 2

# *Are You Defiling Your Temple?*

I was at one of our joint house group fellowship meetings one weekend when I overheard someone complain because she tasted sugar in her coffee as she absolutely hated it. I told the women that I was very surprised at this as I knew she absolutely loved anything sweet. On hearing this one of the younger women said, “But you don’t have sugar in your tea or coffee, Joanna!” “Yes, but that’s because I discipline myself, not because I don’t like it”, was my reply. I then shared with her my love of cakes, ice cream, chocolate, everything that was bad for you, but that I had to exercise strong discipline not to over-indulge. She knew all about these cravings and said that she really found it difficult to be disciplined in this area, especially as she had 2 young children whom she had to cook for. I think food is one of the hardest areas

to be disciplined in. It's not like sex, drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes which can be abstained from completely if we have a strong enough will and a really sincere desire to succeed. It is essential to eat and drink to stay alive. And therein lies the problem - our choice is not whether we eat or not, it's what we eat and how much, and this is especially difficult for people living in the West where there is so much abundance of choice and, sadly, so much waste.

## Food can be an addiction

Animals don't seem to have the same problem that we humans have. The crocodile kills for his meal, but after he has eaten sufficiently he can open his jaws and let the birds pick scraps from his teeth without presenting any threat to them. He will only kill again when he is hungry. But we are not like this. Certain foods we eat actually create a craving and an addiction, and we can keep on eating them whether we are hungry or not. We just have an unquenchable urge to eat. Chocolate is one of the worst culprits, and we only have to look around at the number of fat and obese people in our Western society to see how many have problems in this particular area.

When my son, Izaak, was about 6 years old he found out that the cream powder his Dad put in his coffee was really tasty and would take spoonfulls out of the jar and eat it neat. He knew his Dad would tell him off if he was caught so he worked out a plan to eat it secretly. Unfortunately for Izaak, when Maurice was getting his

coffee from the office drinks station, he noticed a trail of white powder on the carpet and decided to follow it all the way down the stairs to the bathroom. There he found Izaak with a freshly washed face but white powder covering his teeshirt. He asked Izaak if he had been ‘nicking’ the coffee creamer. Izaak’s eyes looked everywhere but his Dad’s face as he said, as innocently as he possibly could, “No!” But his Dad knew. His dastardly deed had been found out!

## Not me mum

When Tamar was about 4, she was also in a similar situation. As a special treat Izaak had bought for himself, out of his own pocket money, a multi pack of chocolate biscuits, intending to savour them over the next week or so. When Tamar saw them she immediately wanted one and Izaak, very generously, obliged her. A few hours later I noticed that Tamar had been missing for quite some time so I went looking around the house for her. The toilet door was shut so I knocked on it and asked if Tamar was inside. She was, but there was a ‘silence’ from inside the little room which sounded a bit ‘different’ somehow. I pushed the door to find her sitting on the loo munching something quickly, her mouth covered in chocolate and the floor littered with Kit-Kat wrappers. She looked so guilty, her eyes wide open aghast that she had been caught red-handed! “Have you been eating Izaak’s Kit-Kat’s?” I asked her. “No!” was her reply ... Again, this little criminal had been caught!

I had to discipline her for her own good. But I understood entirely what she was battling with. I didn't let her see my face but I had to laugh at her misdemeanour ... after all, she had my genes in her, poor thing. I didn't have to answer to anyone concerning my own particular problems in this area anymore, but I still found it almost impossible to eat just one chocolate from a packet or box without having to finish the lot off completely.

When I first left home at 16 years of age to live in a flat, I had an extremely low income. Bills like rent, electricity, gas, tithes, etc., took priority and what remained was spent on food. It's quite amazing how cheaply you can live if you don't mind not having a varied diet.

### Living on the cheap

I didn't have the luxury of a fridge, so many things had to change. For instance I had to use powdered milk, as fresh milk would have gone sour waiting to be used up. Crisp breads replaced bread as it didn't go mouldy quickly. The lady at church who prepared the Communion used to give me the bread which was left over so I was able to enjoy baked beans in tomato sauce on 'real toast' for my Sunday lunch – delicious! I wasn't so fortunate with the sausages though. I would buy a pack of 8 skinless sausages and use 2 sausages for a meal. By the time I got down to the last 2 they were quite furry so I washed and fried them very well and said a long 'grace' over them to make sure they were

sanctified and edible. I may have eaten very frugally, but I was extremely healthy and never even bothered to register with a doctor until I caught the flu' about 10 years later. And even now I only see a doctor when I'm pregnant or giving birth! The fact that I could only afford basic rather than luxury foods had its own compensations ... I began to lose the puppy fat that I'd always thought of as 'my big build', and underneath it all I was surprised to find that I only had a small frame.

### Only eat when hungry

I lived alone for 10 years in a flat and took on board the philosophy that I should only eat when I felt hungry. When meal times came around I would ask myself if I was really hungry, and if I wasn't that particularly bothered about eating then I would wait until I was. I became very undisciplined and didn't have a regular mealtime pattern, which meant that when I was busy I could go all day without eating, but when I was bored, or had time on my hands at weekends, I would eat anything I could get my hands on, which caused me to do everything possible to make sure I was always busy.

I suppose it was inevitable, the more weight I lost the more notice people took of me – especially the opposite sex, and my appearance became very, very important to me. When I was plump men would make crude comments about the size of my rear or chest, but the slimmer I became I found that their gaze lifted until it reached my face and it was a very satisfying and wonderful experience to find men looking into my

eyes when they spoke with me instead of ogling at my well endowed body. I began to feel feminine, womanly and grown up.

The problems begin

My real problems started when I began to live by faith and worked voluntarily for the church. Because I wasn't earning a wage any more, God provided me with sponsors who took me into their own home and treated me as part of their family. I always felt in their debt, so I did as much as I could to make myself useful, baking cakes and other fancy foods to last through the coming week. I wasn't used to regular, proper meals and before long I noticed the weight beginning to creep on again, much to my dismay. Then one evening something happened.

I was eating the Saturday evening 'chippy' supper when one of the chips got stuck in my throat (even now I don't know how that was possible) and seemed to rip the lining of my gullet. I was coughing for ages trying to get up the offending fragment of food but it was resistant. With my eyes streaming and my coughing continuous I retired to bed, lying down with my mouth open, as saliva was pouring out so quickly that I couldn't swallow fast enough to get rid of it.

Eventually I thought of making myself sick in the hope that it would bring up the offending blockage. Almost as soon as I put my hand in my mouth I vomited up the blockage, together with what looked like everything else I'd eaten during that whole day. And I

was amazed at how quickly my stomach had reacted. I went to bed feeling very empty and my throat very sore. But that one action had triggered something off in my mind.

I don't know how soon it was after this initial event, but the next time I felt as though I'd overindulged with my eating I remembered how easily I had brought back my food by making myself sick, and did it again. I began to enjoy that really empty feeling, especially as it meant that if I overate at any time I could be sick and it wouldn't make any difference to my size. The problem was that I didn't limit being sick to times when I'd overeaten, I would be sick after family meals, and eventually it became the routine thing to do after everything I ate.

## Really deceived

My situation changed and I took up full time employment again. The more weight I lost, the more confident I felt. The bathroom scales took a prominent place in my bedroom and I was on them at the very least once a day. I got a great thrill out of buying really small sizes in clothes and laughed when people said I had gone too skinny, thinking that they were just secretly jealous of the fact that I had lost so much weight when they were struggling so hard themselves. I would look into every shop window I came across, not necessarily to view the goods that were displayed but to see my reflection and make sure my proportions were as I desired them to be.

When I was at my senior school I had been awfully conscious of my size. The teachers would shame me into standing in front of everybody to sing solos for the school, saying that I should feel honoured to be picked to represent them. My voice wasn't the problem, I knew I could sing, but I had always been terribly embarrassed when I caught sight of myself in my hideous school uniform - the white shirt and tie tucked into the navy blue, pleated skirt looked gross, and didn't do a thing to enhance my shape. But now that I had lost so much weight I enjoyed standing in public.

Clothes began to matter and I wore the tightest, figure hugging fashions available which would show off my tiny waist and slim legs, and would let the minister know in no uncertain terms that I was extremely insulted when he suggested I should tone my dress code down when ministering on the platforms of churches!

## Paranoid

No matter how slim I became, I never reached the point where I was content. I became paranoid about gaining weight. People began to worry about my weight loss, not just women at work, who were mad jealous of me because I was receiving so much male attention, but people who really loved me and were concerned for me. My minister in particular made a point of praying earnestly for me, and tried on several occasions to broach the subject of food and eating properly. But for some reason I was extremely defensive and sensitive

and would not enter into any sort of conversation concerning my health or diet, even though by this time things were getting way out of control and my health was beginning to suffer.

I began to notice my vision blurring, my teeth loosening and instances where I was on the point of fainting in public places. But even these occurrences didn't frighten me enough to control what had now become a dangerous habit.

### Out of control

But God is very good. Sometimes we won't ask for help until we are so desperate and broken that we realise we actually need it. I remember one occasion when I was out shopping with a male friend. By this time my stomach had become so weakened that I couldn't take tea or coffee and was just drinking water. We were in a cafe and he ordered something to eat and drink and I just asked for a glass of water. I only had a sip when I felt an urgency to rush to the toilets to be sick. It was awful. We walked out of the cafe and I began to vomit involuntarily in the street – right there in front of passers by, and I just couldn't control myself. I felt so embarrassed. This happened on a couple of occasions, and I realised that my habit had gone way too far. It is one thing to make yourself sick, but it is completely different when your body begins to automatically reject food and drink. A situation like that results in death. I'm ashamed to say that even as a Christian I had always secretly desired a disease that

would make me slim, but now that I had Anorexia/Bulimia, I felt scared ... thank God!

Shortly after this incident I was mercifully at the home of the minister, with him and some members of his family. We were having friendly conversation until things began to get a little personal. My eating disorder was mentioned and I immediately got defensive. I fought off the advice and help that was being offered as I had done on so many occasions in the past, but this time I was weakened by the fact that I'd had a few scares to make me think seriously about what was happening to me. Eventually I told the minister that if it was a point of real concern to him then he could pray for me. He acted quickly on this license I had given him and laid his hands on my head.

As soon as his hands were in place I saw a vision in my mind of a devil sitting in the pit of my stomach eating everything that came down my gullet - and it was laughing! In an instant I knew that this devil wanted to destroy God's plan for my life and would kill me to do it. Prior to seeing this devil I had been under the impression that being sick had been my idea, but now I realised that it had been a fiendish and sinister deception. Something rose up inside me and I wanted to fight back at this evil that had taken control of my life.

## Desperate enough for change

For the very first time I wanted to be rid of this satanic influence that I had secretly desired. I began

to pray in tongues as the minister had his hands on my head praying for me, and once again felt the familiar desire to be sick, but this time as I got up and rushed to his sink to vomit, I saw in a vision this devil being vomited up out of my stomach, and God completely delivered me.

Do you know, if we lived the way God intended us to live we would never have to worry about food, the lack of it or the abundance of it? It's interesting to note that when God provided food supernaturally, i.e. the children of Israel with manna, Elisha with the cruse of oil and meal, etc. God didn't think of giving a varied diet, only the basic necessities to pacify the hunger. Jesus said, "Take no thought for what you eat or drink", in other words, don't place so much importance on it. Food is to keep you alive. We don't have to pamper the flesh just because we have the money to be able to buy those luxuries we enjoy so much. What about keeping someone else alive with the money we would spend on our indulgences ... God knows there are millions in the world starving to death whilst we concern ourselves with looking at the labels to buy foods with fewer calories, less fat, or whether they have been organically grown!



Challenge Issue 44  
Take no thought for clothes.  
Matthew 6:25-26

Choice of clothes is of vital importance to millions of people in western society, because clothes are associated with 'image'. What we wear has become a statement about who we are. Buy the clothes, and you buy the image, whether cool and trendy, elegant and sophisticated, or dignified and official. What drives this massive multi-billion pound industry? Why will people swap one perfectly good set of clothes for another set in a few months' time, just to 'keep in fashion'? The answer is covetousness.

Mammon, love of money, covetousness, rules the world. But Jesus says we cannot serve God and mammon - we cannot have both kingdom thinking and the world's thinking. Paul says, "Don't be conformed to this world"; James says, "Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" The whole attitude, disposition and mindset of the world is totally at odds with God's way. Covetousness, 'Image' and 'Fashion' are all mindsets. We have been conditioned by the world to believe that material things will bring contentment, but "godliness with contentment is great gain." Get your eyes off material prosperity and onto Jesus and his kingdom. The race is not over yet!

# 3

## *No need for fig leaves*

It must have been wonderful to live during the time when Jesus walked the earth. Decision making must have been so simple compared to today. I don't recall anywhere in the bible where it talks about people getting undressed for bed and slipping into their pyjamas or night wear. They must have worn the same thing day in and day out, only changing garments when they were filthy and needed to be washed. Boring? Yes, but what a fuss free lifestyle.

New clothes for old!

I must be one of the very fortunate ones, because my parents couldn't afford to kit me out in designer clothes as a tot, so I never really worried about what I wore. My clothes came from either the neighbours or jumble sales. I can vividly remember the first time my younger sister and I were taken to a store to get something new when I was about 9 years old – we both

got a pink 'Duster Coat' each costing £2 from a fire salvage store. Mum set to work making dresses for us from an old pair of floral curtains and, together with our little pink coats, we wore them for the Whit Walks which were regularly held in those days. I was a real tomboy when I was a kid, but in this outfit I almost felt like a princess.

## School uniforms

My first worry concerning clothes occurred when I moved up into the senior school and was obliged to wear a uniform. Mum and dad tried their very best to get a grant to cover the cost of my uniform as they couldn't afford to buy one, but to no avail. I managed to salvage an old shirt and tie from my older brother who fortunately went to the same school, but had to make my own skirt and jumper (and I was only 11 years old!).

My brother in law had a job emptying dustbins and he'd been put on a round where he had to dispose of rubbish from clothing warehouses in Manchester city centre. He'd brought home bags of sewing threads (some of which I still use today), remnants of material and a pile of white, bri-nylon, polar-necked jumpers which had been thrown out. I bought a navy blue dye from the shops and used it on one of the jumpers. When it was dry I cut off the polar neck and cut out a 'V' which I stitched as neatly as I could to make my school jumper. The skirt was just a basic 'A' shape cut out of some of the material salvaged from the bags, and

there I had my uniform. On the first day of term I stood with all the other 'new' kids dressed in their navy-blue pleated skirts, blazers and satchels and I think for the first time in my life knew I looked an absolute mess, but at least I was wearing a uniform.

## Noticing the male species

I was still pretty unconcerned about clothes right up to leaving school and starting employment. My wardrobe offered nothing suitable to wear to a real job so I had to set out making some clothes again. I made 2 'A' line skirts which I wore alternately, and knitted 2 short, sleeveless tops. Because I wore a cardigan over these little tops I did the fronts in one colour wool and the backs in another colour so that I could turn them round on different days - thus it looked as though I had 4 tops altogether.

I was still fairly happy with this situation until I noticed the male species, and this altered everything. I became very conscious of my appearance and also began to notice the other women at work and their effect on men.

## I needed an image

Television, magazines and advertising hoards also shouted their messages, and I realised I just didn't have the image that a girl my age should have. Mini skirts were the order of the day and it didn't matter what shape you were, if you didn't wear the same as everyone else then you just weren't 'with it'. Even

though I was plump and my legs the wrong shape, I made myself mini skirts ... even hot pants! And when the cold weather came I would wear 2, sometimes even 3 pairs of tights with long boots to fight off the shivers whilst I relentlessly gave way to fashion. Conformity is a curse which never brings freedom, and while I worked in firms I always conformed to the image of that particular company, formal in offices, outrageous in advertising agencies, never really knowing the real me.

## Pressure to conform

The beaches presented similar problems. I have seen vast changes in swim and beachwear during my lifetime, from all encompassing swimsuits, to bikinis, to topless, to tiny thongs, and back again. These changes are more easily coped with when you are middle aged or older, but for the young they present enormous pressure which challenges your morals and conscience to see how far you will go to fit in with what everyone else is doing. I have, in the past, thought that it was somewhat easier to be different from the world in my speech, readily professing my Christian beliefs, rather than be different in my dress. Why is this? The world has forced us so deceptively and cleverly into its mould that many Christians are afraid to break free and be different in their manner of dress. I suppose it's rather like going on holiday to a foreign country. For a couple of weeks, even months, its relatively easy to continue to wear your customary dress, but if you decide to live in the community it's not long before

you adopt the dress of everyone around you so that you are accepted into their culture and society. Do we want to be accepted into the worldly culture? For many of us the answer, even though we wouldn't like to admit it, is yes!

### Jews can't hide

I remember some time ago travelling on a plane and during the flight a man and then his partner walked through the aisle to use the toilets. I was immediately struck by the fact that they were both very obviously Jewish. The man wore a black hat and coat, and displayed ringlets and all the rest that goes with it. The woman also stood out to be very orthodox in her dress. I turned in my mind directly to the scripture in the bible where God was telling the Israelites that He wanted them to be a peculiar people, different from everyone else in the neighbouring countries so that all would know by their appearance (regardless of their speech) that they belonged to Him. You might think this is taking scripture too far to consider dressing differently from others in today's world, nevertheless it gave me food for thought.

### God also wants an image

When I was pregnant with Nathan God spoke to Maurice and told him that he wanted him to smarten himself up and present himself in a more dignified manner. Prior to this Maurice had considered himself a musician and as we travelled we would take our

instruments with us – Maurice had 2 bass guitars, I had a keyboard, and I would sing to live backing. In between the songs Maurice would remain seated on his high stool and talk to the congregations or audiences dressed in the frilly or glittery shirts which I had made, because he wanted to present the image of being a musician rather than a preacher. But God told him to change his image. This gave us no cause for concern, as being in the ministry we didn't have money to buy clothes, so we didn't act immediately. But God meant what he said and decided to take the matter into his own hands.

### God's provision

During a weekends ministry at a church in the Midlands the minister asked Maurice to try a suit jacket on. It fitted perfectly. He then went back upstairs and brought down the accompanying trousers, together with 7 other suits, and gave them to him. Problem solved! Or was it? Maurice was still very reluctant to sit on his stool as a musician wearing formal suits - it just didn't look the part. Whilst I was still pregnant and Maurice and I were on holiday, we received a telephone call from home to say that we had been robbed and only the musical instruments and P.A. equipment had been taken – apart from 2 leather jackets which belonged to Maurice. Now it wasn't only a change of clothes, but a change of ministry. It was great for me as I now sang to backing tapes which meant that we didn't have to lug heavy equipment around with us which

had to be set up and taken down for every meeting. But Maurice had a new job. Now the instruments had been stolen he was no longer a musician — God was expecting him to preach!

I found preparing for a new baby was quite a stressful time as being in the ministry I couldn't afford to buy all the things I needed. Maurice would often tell me not to worry because God knew about my needs and would provide everything when the time came. But sometimes I would resent this situation because I wanted my little baby to have things I had personally chosen which were new. On reflection I am really glad that God didn't bless (or curse) us with spare cash because it's so easy to waste money in this area.

Babies and children grow so quickly, changing sizes from month to month, outgrowing clothes, toys, cradles, prams, and so many other things which can cost a small fortune. I didn't have to buy a thing for Nathan, nor for Izaac or Tamar, other than school jumpers and sturdy shoes, and sometimes my children have been given so much good quality, and in some cases designer clothes, that I don't know what to do with them. God promised Maurice and I once that if we looked after his house, then he would look after ours, and he has fulfilled his side of that promise over and over again.

## God's classy clothes

I also have been provided with beautiful clothes, some of which are so elegant and classy that I don't

know who to pass the clothes which don't fit me on to. I remember once singing in a young offenders prison. I was walking through the corridors wearing a gorgeous vivid green cashmere coat with a black velvet collar, accompanied by a couple of prisoners who were carrying my P.A equipment when I happened to overhear a couple of young men talking to each other in a doorway as I passed them. "Hey, the television's here!" I wanted to laugh, because at that time I really did look the part and knew they were serious and very impressed. And God really blessed that night. The kids, after initially showing off and being witty, settled down and became very intent as they listened silently to my message to them from God.

## Lacking but blessed

I think the thing I have been most blessed with is lack of finance. Some people will find this particular statement impossible to believe. But because I have no personal money of my own, and the money given to our ministry is spent on getting out our message via television, books, audio cassettes & C.d.'s etc., we leave God to provide us with everything we need personally.

I never worry about clothes. I can honestly say that I can "take no thought for clothes" because I have enough stock of good quality, classy timeless clothes, to last me for another 20 years, providing I manage to keep within a certain weight range. And after each pregnancy I have had my wardrobe to look at for the

incentive to lose all that extra weight gained so that I can get back into God's bountiful provision for me.



## Challenge Issue 45

Take no thought for tomorrow

Matthew 6:34.

Worldly Christians seek their kingdom now. We seek a kingdom to come. If we lay up treasure on earth and live for this life, our lives are dominated by covetousness. If we lay up treasure in heaven and live for the coming kingdom, our lives are clothed in contentment.

Reasons why it is wrong to take thought for tomorrow:

1. Tomorrow never comes. We rob ourselves of today's opportunities. If procrastination is the thief of time, anxiety about tomorrow is more so.
2. It's the spirit of independence that says, "I'll run my own life the way I want to ... I'll control my future and decide my life."
3. It stops God providing for us. If we are controlling and taking care of every aspect of our life and future, God will not and cannot intervene in our lives. The rich young ruler was trapped by his riches. If he had given it all away as Jesus told him he would have then known God's provision. He missed the greatest opportunity he ever had.
4. Today has enough trouble. It will take all our effort and concentration to live a holy life today. Tomorrow will take thought for itself. Don't do God's job for him. Your earthly future is God's business.

## 4

# *Being Helpless Can Be Exciting*

A good maxim is to ‘start off as you mean to go on’, and most of us try to do this. But I suppose a better maxim would be ‘mean to go on as you start off’, for this is so much more difficult. We all started off right ... as vulnerable, dependent babies, relying on parents or guardians for every single thing. But the older we get the more independent we become, until in the majority of cases we regard any form of help as charity, preferring to solve problems and situations in our own way. For the worldly man, this attitude is usually regarded as good. It makes him a fighter, a survivor. But I believe this is not how God intends Christians to think.

Sometimes I look at my cats and observe how content they are with food, a home and the occasional stroke. I’m sure they would fare much better in other

homes where there are no little children trying to dress them up in dolls clothes or sticking yoghurt cartons on their ears. But they never try to escape and are so peaceful, even when the children are playing really noisily. They are amazing, they can sleep nearly all day. They have no worries.

The children also have no worries. When they are hungry they make sure I know about it, but they never worry about whether or not food will be in the cupboard, they expect I will come up with something. They have never once asked me whether we can afford to pay the bills for food, electricity, telephone, etc. They are secure in their trust that Maurice and I will look after them.

## Solid principles

It is good that we learn to take responsibility, and a good parent or guardian will make sure that their children are taught to do so. My parents did a very good job with me. For although I was only 16 years old when I left home, I made sure that out of my pittance of a wage I would pay my rent before I did anything else. I also knew that I had to pay my tithes to God otherwise I'd never be able to get through the week on what was left. I needed God to help me and so I decided that I would never rob him no matter how short of money I was. God was very good to me. Although my attitude was bad when I first left home and was dismissed from my first 5 or 6 jobs, God was with me and always found me work in time to pay my next weeks rent.

Fortunately, he also worked on my attitude so that he didn't have to keep bailing me out.

### Someone else's responsibility

I remember the day I got married, and the relief I felt now that someone else could take responsibility for me. In some ways I think it's great being a wife as it is reasonable to expect your husband to take care of you. Which makes it easier to put your trust in God because you are already practising on your husband - or should be! It is not so easy for a man, as from childhood he has been impressed that it is his role to take on the responsibility of a wife and family, and so he should. But where does that responsibility end? We have to play our part today, but tomorrow is God's concern.

### A valuable lesson

Some years ago I learned a very valuable lesson. Maurice and I had a little 4-track recording studio, but we used the p.a. equipment and instruments in various venues as we travelled around. Because of this we took out a special (and very costly) musicians insurance which covered our equipment for anywhere in the UK. We had set up the equipment in a church, gone home for our dinner and when we came back to the church ready for the meeting in the evening found that it had all been stolen. Inconvenient for the night, yes, but no problem because we were insured. Or so we thought. The man who had sold us the insurance was so desperate to make a sale that he had deceived

us and had misquoted the small print to us. Thus the insurance company got out of the contract and we had nothing to show for our costly insurance premium. Immediately, I wrote off all insurance companies and classed them as legal rogues.

Maurice got the message - why put your trust in the world when you are serving God? He determined that we would never buy insurance again unless it was against the law not to, i.e. car insurance.

We have been tested

We have been tested on this decision many times. In the previous chapter I wrote about our equipment being stolen a second time and showed that God allowed it to be taken so that he could redirect both Maurice and I in our ministry. Indeed, we have had numerous thefts, and other lessons have needed to be learned, yet we still maintain that no thief can come near us unless God allows them to.

What would the outcome have been if Job, having been stripped of everything, had said, “No problem, wife, we are insured with the Abbey National Insurance Company. We can claim it all back, and we’ll get better next time!?” God would not have been able to prove anything to Satan if Job had been insured by the world. We have to make ourselves vulnerable for God to be able to see what is in our hearts.

When I was living on my own in a flat and working for a Temporary Services Bureau, they did not provide me with holiday or sickness benefit, which meant that I

was only paid for the specific hours I worked. Christmas and bank holidays were a nightmare as I was forced to be out of work, and I couldn't afford to take holidays. I worked for the Bureau for about 10 years and I can only remember taking one week of sick leave when God needed to teach me something which changed the whole course of my life. I often went to work feeling lousy and dreading the day, but by the time I'd got involved with my work, the sickness would be forgotten. I found out from experience that you can either indulge in your under-the-whether feelings, or shake them off by dwelling on something else. The Spirit of God can quicken your mortal flesh (Romans 8:11). I know that no sickness can come upon me unless God allows it, to either get my attention or teach me something, and so I have decided to put my complete trust in God.

## Vaccination

For this reason Maurice and I have refused to allow our children to be vaccinated with any preventative medicines, and we don't give them antibiotics. I do take the children to the doctors if they are sick to find out what is wrong with them, but we don't give them anything other than Calpol as a rule, thus we allow them to build up their own resistance to sickness. When I was pregnant with my children I was amazed to learn that no matter what was wrong with me during my pregnancy I was not allowed to take any medication other than Paracetamol as "everything has

side effects, Mrs. Barratt, and could harm the baby you are carrying”. One midwife told me that the remedy for high blood pressure (not that I suffered with this) was a period of fasting on water! The doctors were so anxious to protect the unborn baby. And yet they will give us whatever we ask for as a quick remedy without worrying about the possible consequences any side effects could have when we are not pregnant! Why put ourselves and our children at risk? And to deny ourselves this facility is just another way of making ourselves vulnerable so that we can learn to put our trust in God.

## Providing for the future

Maurice and I live completely by faith. We have no income and live entirely by donations, and have done so for 20 years. We never make our needs public and never make appeals for funds – God is our source. Yet we send our children to a private Christian School run by born again believers who work with us, as Christian parents, to maintain a consistent lifestyle. We never have to face the threat of them being taught about other religions and false gods, no Halloween or Eide to combat, and certainly no worry of homosexual teachers, which is becoming a case for sex discrimination in our pro gay city of Manchester now. Maurice and I have no little nest egg put to one side for our children. Instead we are providing for their futures now by investing our money in Christian education and daily opportunities to witness Gods wonderful provision.

In 2005 Maurice, Alex (our one time partner at Barratt Ministries) and I were seeking the Lord for a week and were having a time of prayer. As we spoke in tongues together I had a vision. I could see an archway and went to walk underneath it. But as I did so I realised that it wasn't the archway to a tunnel, it was actually a boomerang which was picked up and thrown out. Obviously, because it was a boomerang it returned a short time later as this is what boomerangs do. God spoke to us and said that no matter where he sent us, no matter how dangerous the place may be, we would always return in safety. And if, for any reason, his plan changed he would let us know beforehand.

Maurice looked up startled. He had just been praying in his heart and asking God whether we should go to Plateau State in Nigeria as we had promised because there had been persecution of the Christians and a death threat given to the Pastor of a particular church in that area. Our finances had been very tight and Maurice thought that maybe God was holding things up because he didn't really want us to go. But now that I had received this vision it had taken all doubt away from him and he was ready to get the visas and book the flights in faith. Now I was worried. Having a vision is one thing, but getting the interpretation is quite another - and this actually involved stepping out in faith and trusting God to be faithful to his word.

## Petrol shortage

In the year 2000 England experienced a petrol crisis in our country and countless petrol stations ran out of

fuel. Although Maurice travels many miles each week, he didn't have to cancel one single meeting due to this problem.


I don't do as many miles as him, but as I very rarely listen to the radio, have no television and never buy newspapers, I was totally unaware of the situation and therefore was completely unprepared when the crisis occurred. Nevertheless, I prayed that God would look after us, and that I would have enough petrol to take the children to and from school every day.

You're a nurse!

After a few days my petrol gauge was really low and on my way to pick the children up I saw a queue of cars waiting to be served at a station which had received a supply of fuel. I drove up to the entrance only to be met by two policemen who informed me that the petrol was only for people who worked in emergency services, and advised me to just try to get home on what was in my tank.

I picked up the children and headed for home praying audibly in front of them that God would not let the red petrol indicator go on until I could get petrol. The red light went on just as I approached the station I had passed previously, but this time there was no queue so I again pulled up to the entrance and was met by the same two policemen who immediately recognised me. 'I've seen you before!', one of them said as he came towards me. I apologised for coming again, but as there was no queue waiting I had presumed that it was all

right to fill up my tank. He put his head in through my door window to see how much fuel I had. Then, to my complete surprise he exclaimed, 'I know you! You're a nurse!' and beckoning to his companion he said, 'We know her! She's a nurse and has left her pass at home! Go on love, tell them at the counter that we sent you!' I was amazed - so were the children who kept asking me if I was a nurse! Then Nathan, aghast, said, 'Wow mum, you only just prayed and God answered straight away!' But Izaac groaned laughingly, because getting petrol meant that he still had to go to school the next day – God really had taken care of tomorrow ...



## Challenge Issue 46

### Judge not Matthew 7:1

Judgement means firstly - assessing, examining and weighing up the evidence, making a discernment. Secondly - passing sentence. Jesus says, "Judge not ...", so he means, "do not assess and weigh up", "do not reach any conclusions", and, "do not pass sentence". So what must we not judge? It is our brother's motives or heart. Jesus says 'your brother' so he is specifically talking about Christians judging each other. It is in our homes and churches, in amongst the family of God, that we need to exercise the utmost caution that we do not judge.

There are times when God gives us spiritual discernment as with Peter and Simon the sorcerer. But those occasions are the exception rather than the rule. We can judge, or assess, the 'mote' and the 'beam' in our brother's eye. The whole point is to be able to recognise the fault or problem for what it is, and deal with it. 'Judge not' doesn't mean that we are to turn a blind eye to the faults, failings, problems and sins of others. But it does mean that we cannot, and must not, judge their motives and hearts. Never fear to judge sin and call it by its name, but always fear to judge men and their motives.

# 5

## *Walk a mile first?*

“Two friends took a stroll along the shore of a river. One slipped and fell into the water. He began to thrash about and fearfully cry, “Help! Help! I can’t swim.” His friend unemotionally answered, “You don’t have to shout like that. I don’t know how to swim either, but I don’t make as much noise about it as you do!”

We sometimes judge men harshly for their ill temper, their incivility. We behave otherwise, but can it be that we do not pass through their deep waters?

The Lord called certain men fools (Luke 11:40). A Pharisee had invited Jesus to dine with him. It is not recorded that the Pharisee had uttered one provocative word; he had only marvelled silently that Jesus did not wash his hands before the meal. We would have wondered, too. Without any apparent provocation, Jesus insults the host and all his friends, calling them “fools”. A lawyer who also was a guest at this dinner tried to quieten Jesus. The Lord then turned on him

and all his companions saying, “Woe unto you also, ye lawyers” (Luke 11:37-52). Few hosts would tolerate such behaviour today.

Would you have criticised Jesus?

We judge harshly our unmannered acquaintances. We might have criticised Jesus, too. Have we passed through his deep sorrow to see the essential message of salvation rejected by his own people because of blind leaders who led them astray? Until you have walked a mile in another’s shoes, don’t judge him.” (Extract from Richard Wurmbbrand, *Reaching Towards The Heights*)

Richard Wurmbbrand suffered terrible torture and abuse for his commitment to Christ when, for 14 years he was imprisoned for his faith, and was even held in solitary confinement during this period for 3 years.

Others in similar situations went completely mad, but his relationship with his Lord and Master was enriched to such a great extent that he considered this time to be the most precious experience of his life. He understood things other people have no notion of. He could see beyond the surface to the deep rooted hurts hidden inside others. Even though he had never betrayed his brethren or denied his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he came out of prison with a tremendous compassion for weak Christians as he knew what pressure was, and how it could break and destroy strong men.

I have often considered the story of Job and felt compassion for his poor wife who often comes in for a great deal of criticism. Job was not the only one to

suffer incredible pain in this story. Mrs. Job's grief could even have been more intense at losing her children than that felt by her husband, as she was the mother who had given birth and nursed each one of them at her breast. She knew them intimately as she had taken care of their every need, nursed them through every sickness. It is a known fact that no love surpasses the love of a mother for her child, and she also was bereaved of all her children in one day.

### Reduced to tears

There have been times, when nursing my children through sickness and pain, that I have been reduced to bitter tears knowing that they were suffering much and I could do very little to relieve them. This poor woman had to watch Job daily as he suffered agonies with those boils and not be able to do anything for him. It's no wonder she wished him dead and out of his misery... "Curse God and die," was what she advised. In other words ... "Let God strike you dead Job, so that you can find relief from this torment of your body. I can't stand to see you suffering like this any longer." Wouldn't you have said the same?

### God and Job's wife

God heard what she was saying, but he understood her heart and knew it was out of love for her husband that she uttered such words. There is no word of recrimination towards this woman in the whole book of Job, even though Job's comforters came in for some

heavy reprimands. In fact, God had understood her sorrow and had so much pity on her that he blessed Job through her and opened her womb again. She had the joy of giving birth to many more sons and daughters, and the girls were the most beautiful in the land. God gave her a family of children to love and take care of again.

### Peter's rash words

What about Peter! He also uttered vile, rash words when Jesus had been arrested. He blasphemed and cursed saying that he didn't even know Jesus. His best friend! He'd only just pulled out his sword and cut the High Priests' servants ear off a short time earlier and now he was denying any relationship with Jesus. What amazes me is that this incident is not brought up or mentioned by Jesus when he meets him again. Jesus knew Peter's heart so well, that he seems to totally ignore the fact that this denial ever took place.

When I think back over times in my life when family or close friends have spoken about me behind my back, it has been burning in me to let them know how much they have hurt and offended me. But Jesus knew Peter. He was confident that Peter loved him and so he made allowances for his impulsive tongue. He didn't hold anything against him and was only concerned with making sure Peter knew he understood his fears and why he had acted in such a manner. Jesus repeated the same miracle he had done the first time he had called Peter to follow him, when he had told him to

cast his net on the other side of the boat and there was a miraculous multitude of great fish in the net which began to weigh the boat down. Then Jesus entrusted him with a fresh vision for the future.

## Judging the appearance

There are so many accounts in the Bible of people who apparently did evil things which later on were vindicated. We judge according to appearances rather than with godly judgement. Rahab the harlot, in the Old Testament, not only hid the spies who were sent in by Joshua to spy out Jericho, but also lied to the soldiers who came looking for them, saying that they had already fled the city. Yet this woman, together with her household, was saved when the city fell, and accepted into the Israelite camp.

Another amazing story from the Bible is the account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. Er, Judah's firstborn son, was given Tamar to be his wife, but because of his wickedness God killed him before he had managed to produce any children. Onan, Judah's next son, was then given Tamar and told to raise up seed to his brother (as was the custom at that time). But he refused by lying with her and spilling his seed on the ground, an act which brought the wrath of God and provoked him to kill Onan on the spot! Judah had one last son and by rights Tamar should have been passed on to him. But this son was not yet old enough to become a husband so Tamar was told to go back to her father's house and wait for him to grow up. But in his heart

Judah was determined not to allow his son to marry Tamar in case something he did upset the Lord and he was killed him also.

## Tamar's plan

During all this time, whilst waiting for Shelah (Judah's youngest son) to become a man, Tamar remained faithful as a widow. But it became obvious that Judah had deceived her and was not going to fulfil his promise. Tamar waited for an opportunity and when it presented itself she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil, and sat in the open place where Judah would be sheepshearing. He had recently lost his wife and, mistaking her for a harlot, promised to pay her well for her favours. Tamar accepted his proposal, but as he couldn't pay what he had promised there and then she allowed him to leave some of his personal belongings with her as a pledge. The Lord opened Tamar's womb and she conceived, leaving the area before Judah could redeem his pledge.

## Tamar was more righteous

It took 3 months for people to realise that Tamar was pregnant. She had spoken to nobody about the incident and, automatically assuming that she had been playing the whore, the people were bent on burning her for her obvious sin. Tamar requested that Judah, her father in law, be brought and she told him that the culprit for the life in her womb was actually the owner of the personal belongings she had in her possession.

Judah, of course, acknowledged them, but then said a remarkable thing ... “She has been more righteous than I, because I gave her not Shelah my son.”

Even though their laws and customs were severely strict, it was declared that Tamar had not sinned, and indeed they pronounced her to be righteous. How easy it is to judge by appearances. God had already killed her former two husbands for their wickedness. Now he was vindicating her for an act which, at a glance, everyone would probably see as being far more wicked than the sins of her two dead relatives. But God looks at hearts and motives, he does not judge in the same way that we do.

## David's mistake

King David made a terrible mistake when he took liberties with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. He probably thought that he had made things right by marrying her after her husband had died on the battle field. The fact that God did not visit him and reprimand him immediately must have made him feel comfortable about what he had done. But God just waited, and waited, and waited.


After Bathsheba had borne David 3 children, God could put up with David's blindness no longer and sent Nathan the prophet to make him aware of his terrible sin. David begged forgiveness but God killed his first child who was conceived whilst Bathsheba was still Uriah's wife. Nevertheless, God showed that he had been merciful and had forgiven him by blessing

Bathsheba with another child (the 4th to David and Bathsheba) whom they named Soloman (Chronicles 3:5), and God loved this child (2 Samuel 12:24).

## Space to repent

When I look back over my life and see the things I've done I'm amazed that God has not struck me down dead with a bolt of lightning. Yet the more I look at my life and analyse what has gone on I realise that God knew the reasoning in my heart behind all my actions. People criticise and condemn at the drop of a hat. It is of no concern to them who they libel or slander, they enjoy their gossip - even in the church! But God knows individuals and, although he sees them fall into sin, he gives them much time to repent and turn from their wickedness. If his longsuffering pays off where we see our folly and turn from our wicked ways, he is always ready and willing to forgive and reinstate. But if we become hardened to the fact that we have done wrong and justify our actions, he has to chasten and eventually judge us. Mistakes God can forgive and use to our benefit, but rebellion is another matter, one that God has to deal severely with. If God gives people 'space to repent' without passing judgement immediately, who are we to jump to conclusions and presume? We must guard our hearts!





Challenge Issue 47  
Things Christians must judge  
Matthew 7:1.

There are many ways in which a Christian should judge

1. Sin in the church. Judgement must not be personal. We must not judge the motives or heart of the person involved, only the sin (1 Cor. 5:3-5, 1 Tim. 1:20).

2. Legal disputes between Christians. We will be entrusted with judging the world and angels and we should be preparing ourselves by positively training in judgement, assessment and discernment now (1 Cor. 6). It was shameful to Paul that there was no one in the Corinthian church who was wise enough to be able to judge between brethren.

3. Hypocrisy in the church. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for having double standards - the outward fruit of their inward covetous hearts (Luke 11:37). John exposes hypocrisy in the same way when he says that if we say we love God and hate our brother, we are liars.

4. Prophecy and teaching. Paul encourages the church to judge his words (1 Cor. 10:15). Let the prophets speak and the others judge (1 Cor. 14:29). John exhorts us to try the spirits whether they are of God (1 John 4:1).

5. False prophets. Beware of the wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15).

6. Ourselves. If we judge ourselves we will not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:31-32).

# 6

## *Exceptions To Every Rule*

In the last chapter entitled “Walk A Mile First” I said that although God sees people fall into sin he gives them much space to repent. If his long-suffering pays off, and individuals see their folly and turn from their wickedness, he is always ready and willing to forgive and reinstate. If God gives people time, without passing judgement upon them immediately, who are we to jump to conclusions and presume? We must never judge people’s motives for doing things.

### Judge the Christians?

On the other hand the bible clearly tells us that we should judge those who are of the household of faith. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 Paul criticises the church because they can’t deal with problems themselves, but have to go before an ungodly legal court of law. I have been in

numerous churches and listened to many people who have aired their grievances about this or that. May I say, this is what pastors, elders and the wise members of the church ought to be dealing with, not the visiting ministers who come in from outside.

## Family life

The church, we are told, is a family. When my children have problems amongst themselves I have told them that they must come to me or their father when they can't sort their problems out peacefully. We then make our own judgements and stop their fight. I have made it very clear that they are not to take the law into their own hands by beating one another up. No! This course of action only proves who is the stronger, not the more righteous, and the stronger will always win the argument when using brute force.

## Don't "leave it with God"

Many a church split has occurred because matters have not been addressed. People do not generally like confrontations and would sooner 'leave things with God'. Well, God will use all circumstances to bring about his ultimate goals, but surely that is not the best. Why on earth would God put somebody in a position of authority if he didn't expect them to exercise that authority. When God first called out a people for himself he set judges, not kings, over them. When anyone had a grievance or problem that they could not solve, they sought counsel from the judges. Moses,

who was the first judge, needed help to deal with the people's disputes because so many of them had problems they couldn't handle. This was the order that God had instituted because he knew the heart of man, that they were unable to see the wood because of all the trees, and that emotional involvement blinded them from seeing what others, who were unemotionally uninvolved, could see clearly.

### Hard pill to swallow

I am very grateful for some of the judges I have had in my life. I remember when I was 16 years old going through a particularly hard time after I had left home. I was experiencing awful problems trying to sleep because of recurring nightmares which vividly recaptured incidents from my childhood. One evening, after a music rehearsal, the leader of the group I was in gave me a ride home in his car and asked why I looked so haggard. Was I ill? I fobbed him off saying that I couldn't sleep at night, but he persisted and wanted to know why.

Eventually I shared my nightmares with him expecting sympathy and understanding, but he could see far more clearly than I and discerned immediately that I had a terrible problem with unforgiveness. He told me that as a Christian I should get rid of it. I was angry, of course, because I had justifiable reasons for feeling as I did. But he told me straight that Christians don't have any rights at all, we gave them up when Jesus bought us with His own blood. We are expected to

unconditionally forgive others as Christ unconditionally forgave us.

Hard to swallow? Yes! I wrestled with his judgement for weeks, but eventually gave up the fight because I knew he was right. He was the best friend I had ever had because he wouldn't let me lie to myself. Oh that we would be more concerned for our brothers and sisters in the church. We willingly listen to their tales of woe, but do any of us judge the fact that too often they are in the gall of bitterness, and exhort them as Paul did to "take wrong" and "suffer yourselves to be defrauded" (1 Corinthians 6:7). Surely, this is our testimony, that we are different from the world, and have different codes of conduct.

## Unrighteous judgement

A Christian married woman who had been crippled for many years spoke about the awful way her husband, who was also a Christian, had treated her during their married life. She had warned him that one day the Lord would do something terrible to him so that he would never be brutish to her again. Sure enough something happened to him and he ended up in hospital. His wife visited him and reminded him of her warning that the Lord would do something to get even with him, and was convinced that this was indeed the Lords' doing. He looked at her crippled body and asked why she had suffered so much with her own health, inferring that maybe this was her reward for being a rebellious, hard hearted, unforgiving Christian wife!

It is so easy to look on the situations of others and judge, but what about the things that happen in our own lives. I am convinced that in many cases we are weak and sickly because we haven't judged ourselves as we are encouraged to do in 1 Corinthians 11:30. I remember back to a time when I was living on my own in a flat and fell prey to many temptations. I knew I was living a double life, I attended the church faithfully, and fulfilled all my duties. But when I wasn't in church I was out 'on the town' trying out the world. My conscience troubled me greatly but I had been seduced by all that was on offer. I remember having a vision of myself being caught in a spiders web. The spider, which was 10 times bigger than myself, was just waiting until all my struggling to free myself tired me out, then he planned to strike me and sap all the spiritual life from me.

I was desperate

I knew that God was warning me of what would happen but I was helpless already and couldn't get out of the web myself. I asked God for help and was immediately struck ill, I firmly believe, by God. After a week of this sickness God began to deal with my life and worked a whole set of circumstances which changed my situation. A friend called to see me at my flat and she hadn't been with me long before I realised she needed freeing from demonic influences. I phoned my Pastor and asked him to come round to meet with her but she 'hoofed off' before the Pastor actually came.

My friend's visit had left me shaking with fear, and as I reiterated the events of the evening to the Pastor the Lord gave him a vision – all about me! OK the vision was obscure to anyone else, but I **knew exactly** what the Lord was saying. My life changed from that moment onwards and I never looked back. If God hadn't struck me down with the sickness I would never have been still enough to hear him speak. I thank God I was only ill for one week, many people are sick for years because they won't soften up before God and get rid of the things that are causing themselves, their families or their churches, pain and suffering.

A few years ago, Dave Richards, a dear and Godly friend of my husband and I, was taken to hospital after he had been diagnosed to have cancer. When the consultant came to visit him in his hospital bed he found Dave in tears. Thinking he was afraid the doctor asked what troubled him. Dave told him to mind his own business because it didn't concern him. Dave was tormented inside as he realised that God had found it necessary to go to these lengths to get his attention.

### God doesn't speak forever

God speaks to us many times in the day. If we respond, all well and good, but if we choose to ignore what God is saying there comes a time when he stops speaking because he knows he is not getting through. He then hands us over to our reprobate mind and we eventually reap what we have sown. As Christians we should examine our lives, our circumstances, our

spiritual condition to see if we are reaping something we have sown. If we are enjoying the sweet communion and blessing which comes from a close, healthy relationship with the Lord, all well and good. But if we are not, then let us look back over our lives, be honest before the Lord, ask him to expose what we have been blinded to, and learn to judge our actions and motives. Ask why circumstances and situations which are adverse have come into our lives, because when we are judged down here on this earth we are chastened of the Lord so that we are not condemned with the world when they all have to stand before his judgement throne in heaven.

### Can You Pass The Test?

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. We only have to read the book of Job to realise that God deals with people in his own way, for his own purposes. But when Job looked at his life, he could find no sin. The bible emphatically states that in all the circumstances that happened to Job **he sinned not with his mouth nor spoke foolishly**, and the bible also says that **he that is perfect in word is a perfect man**.



## Challenge Issue 48

### DON'T GIVE HOLY THINGS TO DOGS

Matthew 7:6

A 'dog' refers to a homosexual in Deut. 23. In 2 Peter 2 the 'dog' returns to his own vomit. Peter is talking of false prophets, seducers in the church.

Have we given holy things to dogs? Have we mixed unholy with holy? Ananias and Sapphira, gave money to God. They said all their money was dedicated to God when it wasn't. They called holy what was not holy, and that was enough for God to strike them dead (Acts 5:1-11).

A musician may play in the worship group at church and also work in clubs in the world. If he voluntarily chooses to dedicate his talent to God, it should be exclusively for God. We mustn't kid ourselves about 'dedication'.

Jesus said, "Go into the world and preach", not "Bring all the world into the church and preach". The church are the 'called out' ones, the separated ones, and our meeting places should also be pure.

"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). They now had to keep themselves holy, that is exclusively dedicated for that work. Similarly the apostles, seeing the many physical needs, said, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

Our bodies are holy. They belong exclusively to God. "You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20).

# 7

## *What's Holy About Me?*

Some years ago, when I was working at an advertising agency, I was shocked to hear one of the directors' secretaries say she was really sorry for swearing in front of me. This particular woman had the foulest mouth I have yet to come across. When she saw me gape at her apology she quickly said, "Well, you're holy, aren't you", and she was deadly serious. She wasn't teasing or mocking me in any way. That was her picture of me. She saw me as a holy person, even though it wasn't how I saw myself.

Where's the proof

When we give our lives to Jesus, we separate ourselves from the world (or should do) and Jesus in us walks a different way to the way we always walked

before. Our conversation, attitudes and behaviour We have separated ourselves for God's use.

I loved working at the advertising agency as I mixed with so many eccentric and wacky people. It was an education just being amongst them and it really excited me. And God wonderfully used me in this place of employment to witness to these wild people. Many of the staff, at their own request, came to church with me on various occasions and, as an outcome of this, I set up and ran a prayer & bible study group in the firm during my lunch hour break. It was quite a blow when God told me to leave this firm as he wanted me to live by faith and work full-time for him. For one thing the wages were not the same, there was a massive drop in my income to say the least! I was used to earning and spending my own money in whatever way pleased me, but now God sent people to provide for all my needs and, in his view, I really didn't warrant much – just food, clothes and somewhere to live. This was quite a radical change compared to how I'd lived before.

### Going against God.

After a few years I yearned to buy nice Christmas presents and the little extras I viewed in the shop windows that looked so appealing, so I took on a part-time job as a cashier in a local supermarket which had just opened. It was only 4 hours a day for 3 days a week, but I loved it. I got on well with the staff and was earning my own money again. I commenced working in this store in the October of 1982 and was

put on the cash tills. In those days I had to offload the goods from the counter and stack the trolleys for the customers. Because it was around Christmas time it proved to be very strenuous work as I was handling lots of heavy items with one hand, such as turkeys, tins of biscuits, jars of sweets and chocolates, whilst tapping in the prices on the till with the other hand.

### A frozen shoulder

Before long I had strained the muscles in my left shoulder and ended up with, what the doctors called, a “frozen shoulder”. I was in agony and was completely unable to lift my arm. I couldn’t even comb or wash my hair without unbelievable pain. It was impossible for me to continue working in my condition and the doctor, who prescribed heat treatment (to defrost me I suppose!) told me to lay off all work, including house work, for at least 6 weeks. Because I was a part-timer and had only been at the store for 3 months I was informed that they couldn’t leave my job open for me and requested me to leave. I was really demoralised at their decision, but I knew instinctively that this was a result of my going against God’s wishes when he had already told me to live by faith. I hadn’t seen it as rebellion at the time, but that’s how God saw it.

### A jingle singer

For some years around this period I had been accepting jingle sessions which required me, together with another 3 or 5 other entertainers, to sing jingles

for radio and television commercials. The money was extremely good for these sessions and the work itself was very inspiring and challenging as I was always asked to sing the difficult intricate inside harmonies.

I couldn't be honest

Unfortunately the work was very irregular and as the years went by I wasn't always available when the jobs came up because the ministry became much more demanding. Maurice and I were often out of the country for months at a time on preaching and singing engagements so I wasn't a reliable member of the vocal group as far as the jingle company was concerned. The more I got involved with singing for God, the harder I found it to be convincing about commercial products. Not that I realised it at the time, I really thought I was putting every effort into my work. But one day the director of the studio heard a track from one of my albums and said, "Why doesn't she sing the jingles like that?" There's no answer to that, is there, unless you're a Christian? It just wasn't the same. I clung on to my job as a 'session singer' as long as I possibly could, as I really enjoyed doing them so much. But God allowed other people who were more available than myself to fill my spots and gain favour with the company when I wasn't around, and then sadly the jobs finally stopped coming my way altogether.

An embarrassing situation

But then not everything that we enjoy doing is good for us, is it? God knows what will glorify him

and he will open or close doors according to his plan for our lives. I vividly remember one occasion when I was doing a recording session with the famous hairdresser, Pierre Alexander. He was staging fashion shows in major cities such as London and Paris which were to be very extravagant affairs and wanted to do something completely novel. He came up with the idea that he would like to sing a love song which could be sung as a duet. He would sing one part, and I was offered the job to sing opposite him. I thought this would be a brilliant opportunity and gladly accepted the assignment.

### Singing a lie

Pierre didn't have a good singing voice, but he did have a very sensual Swiss accent. Because he was such an extrovert anyway he threw himself into his part of the love song looking directly into my eyes. I sang my parts with as much conviction as I could muster, but I must confess I have never been so embarrassed in all my life. Being a hairdresser of such repute had made Pierre a very wealthy man with a dubious lifestyle. He enjoyed my embarrassment and thought it very humorous to see me blush, so he did his utmost to add to my confusion by ad-libbing sensual innuendoes which made me want to run out of the recording studio. After the session finished I tried my best to put on a bold front and make him think it was "all in a day's work", but I vowed inwardly that I would never allow myself to be put into that situation again, and would

only sing for God. To sing with conviction songs I feel passionate about.

At Barratt Ministries, which is also our home, we have singled out a particular room and dedicated it to God. We call it our prayer room. At first this just seemed a nice thing to have, but it was only as time progressed that we really understood for ourselves what this actually meant. Alex Robertson, who used to live and work for us at Barratt Ministries, took in violin pupils to earn a little money each week and would teach in the prayer room, as this was where the piano was.

But after a while we felt really convicted about this because the music being played and rehearsed had nothing to do with God at all, he was just conducting his business, so we had to stop the lessons being held there. This room is not a place where people can sit for a cosy chat, either. It has to be used for God whenever it is being utilised, for prayer, conferences, meetings, and such like.

## A peculiar people

If Christ is in us we are holy, and therefore should not yield any of our members to unholy practices because one day we will have to give an account to God for all we have done. God is still looking for a holy people, a royal nation, a peculiar people, so that they can be a testimony and bring glory to him in this wicked and perverse world.



Session singing at Alfasound Recording Studios.





Challenge Issue 49  
Don't cast Pearls before swine  
Matthew 7:6

Jesus is telling us 2 things - not to throw away our 'pearls', but also not to regard them as something to be invested for return. Pearls are precious in themselves; they're not like money, a commodity for trading or investment

The perfection of a pearl comes through suffering. A pearl is formed when a grain of sand or grit gets inside the oyster's shell and irritates it. To stop the pain, the oyster secretes a smooth substance around the grit which hardens into a pearl. The worse the pain, the bigger the pearl. Out of an oyster, an unclean animal, something beautiful and precious is formed. Pearls signify the precious things learned through personal suffering and trial.

Swine are unclean animals. The prodigal son ended up feeding swine and sharing their food. It's the end of the road of carnality and degradation that comes from leaving your heavenly Father. The ultimate backslidden state. 2 Peter 2:20-22 warns of false prophets, who have once been Christians but have now become unclean. Swine can refer to people in the world, carnal Christians, or false prophets. Sharing pearls with these people will not only do no good, but it may do you harm. They will not only 'trample them under their feet', they may also 'turn again and rend you'. Jesus would not cast his pearls to the Pharisees, crowds, or the Gentiles, but spoke to his disciples privately

## 8

# *Can You Be Trusted With Pearls?*

I racked my brains to think of instances where I had cast pearls before swine so that I could talk about it to you, but I realised that if I shared my experiences I could so easily be in danger of doing exactly the same thing again ... because I don't know you, do I? So, to be on the safe side, I looked at the Bible and found quite a number of examples where people, to different degrees, cast their pearls before swine, and I am certain that you will be able to identify with a couple, if not all, of the examples.

### Joseph

Joseph is a good example. To me, Joseph always stands out as a model Christian. He never seemed to put a foot out of place, finding favour with both God and man, in whatever situation he seemed to

find himself. His father was of this opinion too, and because he was such an ideal son he was favoured with a wonderful gift – a coat of many colours – which was an outward sign to his 11 brothers that his father loved him more than them. They hated him because of it, this coat was proof of their father’s feelings for him, and yet Joseph was so pure minded that he wasn’t even aware of their obvious jealousy and hatred.

### All things are pure to the pure

The Bible says, “to the pure all things are pure” (Titus 1:15) and Joseph was so naive that he didn’t even realise they had a problem with him. So when God gave him a dream which let him know that one day his parents and brothers would all bow down before him, he was unafraid to share it with them. Even though his father was disturbed at what this dream inferred, Joseph told them the second dream God gave him to confirm the first. Needless to say, when Jacob asked Joseph to see how his brothers were doing on the hills, he had no idea the fate they had cooked up for him. He ended up being sold into slavery, thank God! It could have been worse, they had originally intended to kill him!

### An unwise trust

Joseph had trusted his brothers. Is that wrong? Yes, if they are only brothers on the outside and not on the inside. There are many in the church of God who masquerade as brothers, but they are really wolves

in sheeps clothing. On a number of occasions, now I look back, I can see instances where I have unwisely entrusted my so-called brethren in the church with revelations that God had given to me personally. Instead of being blessed at the things I shared with them, they have often been jealous of even the fact that God has spoken to me (as if he shouldn't, after all we are supposed to have a PERSONAL relationship with him), and instead of being encouraging, they have doused me and implied that I have been presumptuous. This is just one of the ways new Christians lose the fire God has baptised and blessed them with, and it's usually the older, settled, inactive Christians who throw the water on their excited flames.

## The wise men

What is your opinion of the wise men who always seem to appear on the Christmas cards? Until a few years ago, I never gave it much thought. But after a conversation with Maurice I realised that they indeed were a tool of the devil. These men were star-gazers, they read the future by the way the stars were arranged in the heavens, thus when they saw the new star they realised that a new king had been born. This was indeed revelation. God puts the stars in the sky, this was revelation from God. But they were not godly men, they were worldly, carnal, and cast this incredibly important revelation before a despot – Herod. Why didn't they go to the leaders of the Jews, someone in the synagogue who was watching and waiting for the

Messiah? Because Satan wanted to destroy this new king. Just as Pharaoh had killed all the baby boys who were aged two years and under which forced Moses to be hidden for his own safety, so Herod destroyed all the baby boys two years and under and an angel was sent to instruct Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt with Jesus lest Herod should find and kill him.

The wise men were not wise at all, they nearly fouled up the whole plan of God because they spoke out their revelation in ungodly ears. There are many God-haters in the world who would do anything to destroy or thwart God's plans from coming to pass.

Look at what Hitler did to the Jews during the last war, and still there are those who would do anything within their power to wipe out the Jewish nation entirely.

## Solomon - the worst example

I suppose Solomon is the very worst example I could bring from scripture. This man was abundantly blessed by God. The Bible states that "God loved Solomon" (2 Samuel 12:24) and Solomon loved God and wanted with all his heart to follow in the footsteps of his father David. He built the temple, God's house, and was lavish with the gold and precious materials which were used. No expense seemed too great, and when it was finished the dedication ceremony was also excessive, as thousands of sacrifices were killed and offered to the Lord. Indeed God was so pleased with the outward show of Solomon's love for his Lord that the glory of

God fell on the temple and the priests were unable to perform their duties.

## Solomon's wisdom

That very night God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him what gift he desired. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the people. God was so pleased with this request that he granted his desire, but promised wealth, long life, and the things he didn't ask for also. God said there would be no-one as wise as Solomon, either before or after him. His fame went throughout the world and people, kings and queens, travelled from tremendous distances to see his wealth and hear his wisdom, and marvelled at this incredibly gifted man. But his blessing became his downfall.

## Solomon's disobedience

It records in scripture that Solomon added to himself all the things that kings were specifically told not to – horses, women, etc. In fact Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! And these women were not all Jewish either, they were from other lands and came to him with their own personal gods. Solomon built houses for his wives and places for them to worship their gods, and eventually his love for these women turned his eyes and heart away from the God he once loved, so that he also worshipped the gods of his wives.

The gifts and callings of God are without repentance, the Bible says (Romans 11:29). God didn't take Solomon's wisdom away even though he backslid, which

is a shame really, because Solomon is reputed to have backslidden so badly that those in witchcraft and the Freemasons trace their religion back to the writings of Solomon. He wrote much when he was a godly man, but it seems he also wrote much when he had fallen from grace. Another name for the “Star of David” which Christians are keen to wear, thinking it to be a godly Jewish symbol (I have yet to come across this “Star of David” in scripture), is known to those in witchcraft as “Solomon’s Seal” and is considered by them to be a very powerful symbol. It appears that when Solomon turned from God he really did become a “swine” and trampled the pearls that God gave to him underfoot, and turned on His Creator to rend Him.

### The danger of knowledge

Jesus used to speak in parables, and when the disciples questioned the reason for this He said, “this people’s heart is become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15). There are divine truths that God just doesn’t want to share with everyone. We have to have our hearts in the right condition before he can trust us with certain information and power. So much damage has been done to the Kingdom of God by those who are full of knowledge of the scripture, but have rebelliously lead their own ungodly lives.

After looking at various characters in the Bible, I have come to the conclusion that God is always looking for people like Mary and Joseph to entrust with his secrets. Such a young girl to be told by an angel that she would bear the Son of God without knowing a man, especially when she was already engaged to be married. How could God expect her to keep silent about what she had been told and not even defend herself to her betrothed? And for Joseph, what a secret to have to keep that he was rearing the Messiah? But the Bible records that Mary hid all that happened to her and kept it locked away in her heart (Luke 2.19). We, like God, should be looking for people we can trust, people who have been proved lest we cast our pearls before swine. We also should be people who can be trusted to keep our own counsel and integrity lest we ourselves be in danger of becoming swine. These people are rare, but if we look closely around us we will see that they can be found.

### Esther's Secret

The story of Esther is quite remarkable. At the beginning of the story this woman went under another name, Hadassa, which was a Jewish name. But when the decree went out from the king for all the beautiful young virgins to be brought before him, Hadassa hid her identity and took upon herself an assumed Persian name, Esther, so that her secret could remain concealed.

After the required preparation period, the time had come for the young girls to be presented to the king

to see if there was a special woman amongst them he could elevate to become his bride, his queen. Little did Esther know that God had destined her to fill this role and she became Queen of Persia. Why make this young Jewish girl Queen of Persia when there must have been many beauties in the land who could dazzle the king with their loveliness? This favour was bestowed upon Esther because it was God's plan. Even her good looks were given for a reason. He had a purpose for Esther to fulfil which could only become a reality if she was in this exceptionally high position, and she needed to be able to keep her identity secret without spilling the beans before the appointed time.

For such a time as this

Haman's hatred for Mordecai, Esther's cousin, had reached such a peak that he determined in his heart to not only destroy him, but every living Jew - men, women and children. He hated these people. Like Hitler and other despots before him he wanted to completely stamp out the entire Jewish race. Haman talked the king into permitting him to destroy these people whom he accused of being rebellious and trouble makers and posted bills in every province ordering that all Jews be annihilated.

But God had put Esther into this position 'for such a time as this', and gave this godly woman the wisdom to know what to do in these circumstances. After she and her maidens had completed a 3 day total fast she put her life on the line when she went into the king's presence without being summonsed by him.

But God was with her and granted her the favour she needed to be able to plead for and save the whole Jewish nation and completely destroy all their enemies.

## Keeping a secret

God is looking for this type of person. He can reveal his plans and purposes to them and know that they will not be ruined. So often people hear from God and blab it aloud as quickly as possible because they have 'heard from God', 'God has spoken to them', it makes them feel important and special. Sometimes when Jesus was on the earth and he had healed someone he told them not to tell anybody about it. When Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James and John, he told them not to share what they had seen with anyone. There is a time and place for everything. We know about these incidents now because Jesus has fulfilled his purpose on earth and the whole story is being told.

We learned about Esther's secret because God was allowed to work and bring his plan together without hindrance, and now the whole story has been come out into the open. If you can't be sure that your pearls will not be trampled under foot by those you desire to share them with, then whatever you do don't cast



## Challenge Issue 50

### ASK: IT SHALL BE GIVEN (Matthew :7)

unanswered prayer is the biggest blight on Christian life, the greatest hindrance and discouragement to the spirit of prayer and faith. Yet so rarely Christians stop to question, "What went wrong? Why did God not answer the prayer?" It is vital that we understand the teachings of Jesus. Are there any conditions to this statement? Yes! "If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him?" If a child asks for £50 to buy sweets, his father will say no. It's not a 'good gift'. We are God's children and don't always understand what is good and what is bad for us.

Asking is the natural thing to do when we want - whether it is from need or greed. Confident faith in God's care is better than the asking that springs from constant doubt. Jesus rebuked his disciples for being anxious about daily necessities saying, "Your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things".

There is no greater encouragement to our faith than when our prayers are answered. It motivates us to pray.

## 9

# *Thank You Lord!*

One of the most beautiful characteristics of Christianity is that you never need to worry about your future, because God has promised to take care of that for you. When we have needs, we don't have to worry, we can bring them to God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that we were to *take no thought for our lives, what we eat, drink or what we wear because our Heavenly Father knows we have need of all these things ... but we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and other things will be added.* Once we have started on the path of discipleship we are in line for "all these things" to be added, and I've found in my own experience that I've never had to struggle and strive in prayer for certain things.

For instance, when I first left home I had a terrible time holding down a job just because of my untameable character. I seemed to argue with all in authority and bosses would not stand for my disagreeable attitudes.

This was a real problem for me because I needed to work to ensure that my rent would be paid every week, otherwise I wasn't only out of a job, I was also out of my home! I decided to take on work with a temporary employment agency who would place me in a job for a day, or a week, depending upon how long a firm required temporary assistance to cover for a member of staff who was either sick or on holiday, or to do a particular job until the firm found a permanent employee. I really enjoyed this type of work because I was never there long enough to get involved with arguments, and if someone infuriated me I could just say to myself, "No problem, I probably won't be here next week!" And sure enough, I would usually be moved elsewhere.

### No security

The only problem with this type of employment was that I was not secure. There was no holiday or sickness pay to look forward to, and the agency couldn't guarantee that I would always be in employment. I was told upon enlisting that a report would be sent back to the agency and if I worked well and the bosses were pleased with me, then I would be given priority to be placed in a job before others in their employ. This was a wonderful incentive, and I prayed earnestly that God would help me with my attitude and keep me in work. God answered my prayer. I always loved to work and have the challenge of learning new jobs, consequently bosses would very often request that I was sent to them

when they needed help, and throughout all the years I worked for the agency I was never once out of work.

## God's provision

Maurice was looked after in a similar way. He's lived at our present home since he was about 23 years old and used to subsidise his income by letting it off as furnished apartments to married couples or small families, and later on as furnished rooms to students from Manchester University who needed accommodation. After some years of doing this God told him to only rent rooms to Christians, then God told him not to rent rooms out at all. At this point Maurice turned his hand to coach painting to subsidise his income and earned more doing this than he had ever earned in his life. Then God called him to work full time in the ministry and to give up secular work altogether.

## Afraid to disobey

Maurice realised that this meant trusting God to provide for himself, his wife and 2 young daughters, but he was more afraid to disobey the voice of God, than to trust God to provide, so he made a commitment to do as God had commanded. Immediately, God sent me to the house. I had a very well paid job and voluntarily said that I would add my whole salary every month to the part time wage of his wife and the meagre salary his young daughter received doing a job on 'works experience', to pay the rent, bills and food. Since making this promise to God, Maurice has given

himself to the ministry and never done secular work, and God has always met his needs. He has had his faith stretched many times, and been up many nights praying that God would help in times of crisis, but God has always been there for him.

### A miracle every month

Indeed we continually need a miracle every month to keep going at Barratt Ministries. We have so many needs. We don't honestly know where all the money comes from to allow us to carry on with the work, but God told us once "not to despise the little sixpences" because if we kept collecting the small amounts people bless us with they would add up. People often expect God to send them mighty windfalls to clear all their debt and make them worry free, but that doesn't really build up faith and trust in God. We know that God answers prayer and is worthy of our trust because we have lived on this knife edge for such a long time. Our faith in God is built on experience.

### The cruse never empties

People could say Maurice and I are irresponsible having children with no secure means of income, but we never need to claim support or benefit from the world. God gave us the promise that "if we build His house, then He will build ours".

From the time I was pregnant with Nathan, our first child, the Lord has bountifully supplied. I was the beneficiary of two baby 'showers', one in America and

one in Holland, when Nathan was given so many useful items ranging from clothes to creams and nappies. I was loaded up with bags full of clothes for each stage of his growth, so much so that I was able to pick and choose what I really liked and wanted. The funny thing about this was that my children have often worn really 'cool' designer clothes without my even knowing it, and it has given me lots of opportunity to witness to God's goodness when other mothers have made comments. I've never had to worry about prams, cots, bedding, highchairs, toys, and so many other things because God has seen the need and taken care of it. Sometimes even before I've asked Him to.

## Divine duck

We've not only been supplied with clothes, Maurice and I lived for a short period of time in Holland as Maurice was helping an organisation called Johan Maasbach World Missions and building a video edit suite at their headquarters in the day time and preaching at their churches in the evenings. The Maasbachs were really kind to me and passed on some lovely educational toys which their own children had outgrown.

Helen Maasbach in particular put herself out to ease my situation as a pilgrim in a foreign country and gave me lots of support, encouragement and advice as she was not only the head of the children's work for the thirteen churches pioneered by the Maasbachs, but also a mother of three kids and had much experience to relay.

*Thank You Lord!*

Much later on when back home in England someone gave me a little two wheeler bike for Tamar. As she was only five years old, Izaak, her senior brother by four years protectively warned me that she couldn't possibly ride it as it had no 'tranquilisers' on it! I think he meant stabilizers, but it gave me a good giggle and something to remember to share with his future wife one day.

God hasn't only provided material things for us, many times people have been prompted by God to bless us with food. I remember one Christmas when we didn't have meat, some gypsy friends of ours called to see us as they wanted to give us some carpet. When we went to their van to help them in to the house with it, we saw half a duck wrapped in foil, which they hadn't been able to use. They had wanted to give us this too, but felt that we could have been insulted if they had offered. We put their minds at rest straight away and thanked the Lord for this very thoughtful provision also.

## Too much to use

There was another period when very often some other contacts of ours would drive up in their van and drop off bin liner bags full of scones, cakes, donuts, and so many different kinds of bread that I couldn't list. They did this for months. They even gave me a freezer so that I could keep what I needed without it going stale.

We were given so much that I was able to pass on bags full of these goodies to the parents in my

children's school, and also take some round to the hostel for battered wives and mothers nearby.

On another occasion we were blessed with trays and trays full of tinned stewing steak. It had been a long time since we had tasted anything so good and at first we were eating steak practically every evening. But as the tins kept coming into the house, we began to disperse these into other homes where we knew there was a financial struggle and the Lord didn't only bless us but, like with the loaves and fishes that little boy in the Bible donated to Jesus, so many others were blessed also.

God doesn't only send people to the house with provisions to make us feel blessed, I feel this way about the fact that I have so many low cost supermarkets around me who are in competition with each other. OK, I don't buy brand names which are supposed to be of superior quality and taste better, but for the limited amount we have to spend each week on the groceries I can stock our cupboards up with all the necessities and even get praise from my children at the end of a meal for the wonderful dinner they have just eaten! Maurice is always polite, but to be complimented by the kids ... well, this is praise indeed!

## God knows our needs

When we pray "give us this day our daily bread", and "Lord, please look after us and provide us with what we need", I don't feel as though I need to name specifically what I want because the Lord knows what


we need, even when we don't. For a long time, because we have so many visitors at Barratt Ministries, people have either hinted, or else I've thought, about getting a dishwasher. But after considering the running costs – electricity, soap powder, rinsing liquid – I had dismissed it as fanciful. But on one trip to Belgium when Maurice and I visited some friends, **two** couples, **on the very same day**, told me that God had told them to buy me a dishwasher. To be honest, when the first person mentioned this I immediately thought of the running costs and said to myself that this was a lovely thought but most impractical. But when the second person told me, faith sprang into my heart and I realised that God wanted to bless me as two is a witness. I mentioned my dilemma to the first couple and asked what they thought I should do. "Accept your second offer for the dishwasher, and the money we would have given you for this item is still yours to use to buy whatever **YOU** need, not Barratt Ministries." Hallelujah, the dishwasher was installed, together with the other things I had really wanted for myself and the children but couldn't justify spending the money on. "Thank you Lord for your promise that when we ask you to look after us you really do give us good things."



The only picture in captivity! Jason Robinson trying to impress us, playing Nathan's old guitar whilst wearing one of the frilly shirts I made for Maurice.

Cooling off after a coaching session of rugby in the garden. Izaak excited, and Nathan wearing part of the kit Jason bought him.





Challenge Issue 51  
SEEK: YOU SHALL FIND  
(Matthew 7:7)

Asking is simple. Seeking is more costly; it demands time and energy. You can ask for something while sitting down. But to seek something, you have to get up and move. We have already found that we cannot just ask for anything and expect to receive it. We are to ask for good gifts. So likewise the same principle applies to seeking. We must seek good things; then we can have the confidence that we shall find them.

What good things can we seek? Seek God himself. If it is good to seek good gifts, it is better still to seek the giver of the gifts. Seek God's favour - there is a vast difference between seeking God's face and seeking his hand. Seek justice, seek righteousness, seek God's will, seek to edify the church, seek heavenly things.

However it is possible to seek God and not find him. Where there is disobedience in our life, we will not find God when we seek him. If we seek God with a wrong motive, he will not answer us. Lack of faith will stop God from answering.

There's nothing like adversity to make us seek God. When we are at ease and in blessing, we rarely have the motivation to make the effort of getting down on our knees and spending time seeking God. But in desperate times, in crises and affliction, we seek him; and he knows that.

# 10

## *All These Things*

Permit me this indulgence but I really must share something very personal which has been a tremendous blessing to me, and I'm absolutely sure will also bless you.

Nathan, my eldest child, dearly loves the Lord and used to attend a wonderful Christian School, run on godly principles by born-again, Spirit-filled believers who had adopted 'Fit For Services' as their school motto. When Nathan was 6 he was taken, along with an entire group of other pupils, to a joint service of Christian schools around the North West region of Manchester where they all participated in praise, worship and had a message preached to them. At the end of the meeting Nathan went forward to publicly commit his life to Jesus and promised to read his Bible and pray every day.

Nathan took this commitment very seriously and endeavoured to keep his promise. Some nights I would be outside his bedroom unbeknown to him and would

hear him talk to God as though he was sitting in the room with him. He would tell God how much he loved him and wanted to serve him, and would beg God to guide and direct his life as he only wanted to do his will, whatever that may be. To hear his intimate and exuberant chatter would sometimes bring me close to tears as I remembered the abandoned and innocent relationship I once had with God before all the responsibilities of caring for a family stole my time and energy.

### A giving heart

A couple of weeks before Nathan's 9th birthday (2001), friends of ours from Open Doors came to share what had happened to them on a recent trip to a dangerous country where Christianity is forbidden, and made an appeal for finance to provide Bibles and other necessities for the believers there. Nathan had been saving for about a year to buy a bike and had collected around £45, but wanted to help, so asked if he could contribute some of his own money from his savings. Once we had said this was OK he emptied his money-box and put the entire contents into the basket. I have to admit I was a bit alarmed at this, thinking that he would probably be sorry about it later. But he was adamant. They needed the Bibles more than he needed a bike, and he wanted the money to stay where it was. Maurice said a prayer with him after the meeting and asked God to look after Nathan's needs, thinking that God would probably provide him with a

bike from somewhere. But Nathan was just content to give the money to God.

## God's blessing on Nathan

On the Monday following this incident Maurice was due to speak at a house group in Bradford. The man who ran the meeting, Martin Morris, knowing that Maurice was interested in musical equipment, showed him the new guitar which he had bought, but then announced that God had spoken to him and he wanted to give his old one to Nathan. Maurice expected a well worn, clapped-out guitar to be given to him but was astonished when Martin brought downstairs from his bedroom a black, hard case which, when opened, revealed a fur lining which had a compartment for putting plectrums and a duster in. The guitar nestling in this beautiful case would be coveted by any serious musician. It looked just like an 'Ovation', was in perfect condition, and could be played both acoustically and electrically ... too much for an 8 year old! But this man believed God wanted Nathan to have it.

## God knows our talents

Within a matter of 3 months Nathan was strumming out a good, solid rhythm and could play quite a number of chords. He had even begun to write his own songs. Nathan gave away the money that could buy the bike he desired, but God had seen his heart and had given him direction for his future. Nathan knew God wanted him to be involved in music, and in the year after receiving

the guitar he composed some authentic sounding Filipino music which was used on a video showing the work some missionary friends of ours were doing in the Philippines.

## More Blessing

Shortly after this event some other friends of ours, Jason and Amanda Robinson, together with their 2 children, paid us a visit. Amanda, who could also strum a guitar, asked Nathan to play his beautiful instrument for her husband who had never yet heard him play. Nathan, always pleased to play before an appreciative audience, was delighted to do this, especially as all my children were very fond of this man who also happened to be a very famous rugby player and was a tremendous Christian example for them. Nathan started off playing a chorus which we all sang lustily together, then he sang a song which he had written himself. I looked over to the tough, rugged husband and saw his eyes become very soft and tender. When Nathan had finished he just smiled at him and told him how much he had appreciated his performance.

The next morning, Jason called again, as his wife and children had stayed overnight with us. I was in the kitchen busy preparing food when he turned up at the patio door. I heard his voice calling to me from the doorway, asking if it was all right for Nathan and Izaak to go to a sports shop with himself and his son as he needed to get something. I thought this was a great idea as it would get these boisterous boys out of

the way for a short while. But an hour or so later my boys came home with faces grinning from ear to ear, both carrying bulky JJB Sports plastic bags. They ran excitedly to show me what was in them and both bags contained ... running shoes, football boots, a track suit and a T-shirt to match. The kids were delighted.

I later asked Jason privately why he had done this, and he told me that when he saw Nathan playing his guitar with so much love and dedication to God, it had really touched and moved him, and he felt that he just wanted to do something to bless him back. I know Nathan was blessed, especially as he felt what he had done had earned such a blessing that his brother and best friend, Izaac, was able to share in this blessing too. But as the mother, and knowing that Nathan at such a very young age had given his all after seeking God and his will, I felt I was blessed more than everyone else.

## Izaac's Disappointment

God did something wonderful for little Izaac too. He has a lovely personality and because he is the younger brother (3 years younger than Nathan) he knows that he has to wait his turn for most things – “When you’re older”, is a phrase he often hears, or “Your turn will come” – But he doesn’t complain, and he is very generous. Maurice was booked to preach in Belgium during the summer holidays that same year, and friends of ours who live close by to the people who accommodate Maurice asked if Nathan and Izaac could also come to have a holiday with them and

their children. My kids were delighted to be going to another country where they speak a different language and were packed a week before they were due to leave.

## No passport

On the very morning that Maurice and the boys were due to catch the ferry, Maurice checked through the documents and passports but found to his horror that Izaak's passport was a year out of date! We had to break the news to Izaak. This had been a terrible oversight on our part and it was possible that he may not be able to go after all. I could see Izaak was truly disappointed, but he kept hugging me and telling me that he didn't mind. Maurice did his best to get someone in authority to allow Izaak's trip, but nobody would give him the OK. The people dealing with Maurice's query suggested that the only thing he could do was take Izaak to the ferry, explain the situation, and see what happened. But they couldn't guarantee anything, and it was very likely that he would be turned away.

I saw little Izaak sitting on the floor with his head down and I asked him what he was doing. "Just thinking", he said. I asked if we should pray together and see if God would make it possible for him to go on the holiday. "You can if you want to, Mum, but I know that sometimes God says no". Oh, the little dear. He didn't want to ask in case he was refused. He didn't feel important enough, yet he didn't feel bitter or resentful, it was just a fact. I wanted to cry. He too

had given his heart to Jesus recently and tried to follow his older brother reading his bible and praying every night. But he always felt in Nathan's shadow. God had done so many things for Nathan. I so badly wanted God to show Izaak that he, too, was important, so prayed with all my heart that God would take care of the situation and let Izaak go.

### The miracle happens

Our co – worker, Alex, followed behind Maurice and the boys in another vehicle on their journey to the ferry just in case Izaak was not allowed to get on board, but amazingly he returned home alone. God had worked a miracle ... and it was a miracle, because Maurice certainly didn't look like Izaak's father – more like his grandfather! A few hours after they had left home I received a phone call from an ecstatic little boy saying that God had answered our prayer and he was on the ferry. The Bible tells us to seek the Lord with all our heart and He will grant our hearts desires. My children are learning from a young age that they can rely on God. He is totally trustworthy.

### My blessing

I also experienced a tremendous blessing. Since having a family my life had been turned upside down. The things I considered so important before – quietness and time to seek God – had been snatched away by the broken sleep and daytime demands of young children. I've passed through condemnation,

defeat, helplessness, so many emotions, but all the time yearned with all my heart for the relationship I once had with God. I knew it was only a matter of time before my youngest child, Tamar, who would be 3 years old on 6th December 2001, would also go to school, and so hung on. But a wonderful thing happened.

Both my older children already went to a fee-paying Christian school which meant that Maurice just didn't have enough faith to commit himself to send Tamar to the preschool. But after going to a conference and hearing the message which was preached, faith came into his heart and he rang me to say she could start straight away, if the school would accept her, instead of after Christmas, when they had the next intake of pupils. He also made me book a break for myself for 5 days at a Christian centre in Wales.

## A wonderful holiday

As soon as Tamar went to school things changed. But going on the retreat was what made all the difference. At last I was on my own with my Bible. I read, prayed, thought and sewed some items I had taken with me to mend as I listened to a cassette by David Wilkerson which I'd found on the premises. I was on holiday with my Best Friend whom I hadn't been alone with for years, and there seemed to be so much catching up to do. I was transformed, refocused, invigorated, it was wonderful. I can thoroughly recommend it. My husband said he had his old (cheek!) wife back. Paul the apostle said that his whole aim was to know Christ ... Make

opportunity to seek the Lord and this will truly give you the fulfillment you are seeking.



Challenge Issue 52  
KNOCK: IT SHALL BE OPENED  
Matthew 7:7

Ask, seek and knock are not just 3 different ways of saying the same thing. Asking is a simple petition, seeking demands effort, action and perseverance, but knocking is praying to a 'closed door'. You can't do anything at the closed door, except knock and keep knocking. A closed door is an obstacle. But you are knocking and asking him to open it again. In other words, you are asking him to change his mind. You may think it is not possible to change God's mind, but scripture shows we can.

After the golden calf incident, God determined to destroy Israel. God had made up his mind. That was a closed door. But Moses started knocking at the closed door and tried to change God's mind. This was no ordinary prayer. He knew God in a real way. Moses was the right man, in the right place, at the right time. Moses asked God to repent! "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people" (Ex. 32:12). But more amazing is that Moses' plea was heard. "And the Lord repented" (v 14). The closed door was opened. God changed his mind. We have no excuse not to pray until we get an answer - to knock until the door is opened.

Prayer does not always bring the answer we want, but if we persist we will always have some answer from God.

# 11

## *When God Shuts A Door, He Opens A Window*

Funny, isn't it, how you always seem to think that God will get excited about your ideas of how you can bring glory to Him. You pray so hard that things will change, just to prove to everyone that because you are a Christian, God will hear and give you what you ask for.

I remember when I was pregnant with my first child, Nathan. All the way through the pregnancy he was in the breech position, but the midwives and other mums assured me that there was every reason to expect him to turn the right way round in my womb at the last minute ready for birth. Unfortunately, Nathan never did want to turn. In fact on two occasions a doctor, then a consultant, tried to physically turn the baby by

manipulating him in my stomach (ouch!), but Nathan just sprang back to lie in the position he'd found most comfortable throughout his short life. I was being pressed by the doctors to book in the hospital ward for a Caesarean Section delivery but wouldn't commit myself as I still expected God to do a miracle to show everyone just how powerful he was.

## Deflated and humbled

Maybe if my name had been Daniel instead of Joanna, and I'd been someone important instead of a little ordinary housewife, he would have stepped in. But he didn't ... and then the labour started. I went through 12 hours of labour only to be rushed to the operating theatre for an emergency Caesarean Section operation because Nathan was stuck in the birth canal and in trouble. Deflated? Yes. Humbled? Yes. Grateful? Yes. Thank You Lord that I live in a day and age when the medical profession can save life, and that I live in a country where I can freely receive these benefits. God didn't answer my prayer for a miracle, but proved that *'his grace was sufficient'*!

## Welcome to motherhood!

I'd continued to take ministry bookings scheduled for after Nathan's birth because I hadn't known what motherhood entailed. My child was a seasoned traveller at the tender age of 5 months having already stayed a month in the USA and another month in Holland, together with many trips to various venues in the UK,

but I felt on the verge of collapse as exhaustion took its toll on me. I reasoned it out in my own mind, and felt absolutely certain, that God wanted me to stay put in England for at least a year until Nathan was settled, and then take up my post with Maurice again. But Maurice was reluctant to accept this solution. I prayed that God would speak to him and tell him what I felt sure he had told me, before our proposed one month tour of Scotland with our small baby in tow. We had planned for a short holiday in between tours to give us a breather and, as we were visiting a church where we were not known, I asked God to speak to Maurice. But all throughout the service the Lord was talking to me, emphasising very strongly indeed that the circumstances were not important - **THE CALL WAS!** Knowing from experience in America and Holland what I was in for, I recommitted myself to God's service and begged him to give me the strength to fulfil his call on my life.

## God helps us

Within a matter of days Maurice's younger daughter to a previous marriage offered to come with us in our 5 berth touring caravan to Scotland with us as a nanny, to look after Nathan each evening we were out ministering so that he had some stability and security. The repercussions from my decision astounded me. God didn't answer my prayer to be relieved of my calling for a while, he provided me with a whole new set of circumstances to emphasise yet again that *'his grace*

*was sufficient'!*

Life was never the same once our child was born. The routine and regularity of my childless life was shattered. Quiet time? What's that? This bundle made so many demands, at all sorts of ridiculous hours, and had to be tended ... immediately! I loved my baby, but I resented not being able to spend the hours with God that I was used to, you know, first thing in the morning, before you start your labours, with time to come round from your sleep, and a quiet cup of coffee to wake you up. No fear, Nathan knew how to wake me up, not only in the morning, but 4 or 5 times every single night until he went to school at the age of 3.

Constantly tired

I was constantly worn out. It irritated me immensely that Maurice was able to go about his own routines quite normally. He couldn't breast feed so slept whilst I got up with the baby, and had his regular quiet time with God because the child needed me. I became so frustrated that I almost demanded we took it in turns to have some time with God in the mornings. But this just didn't work out as I'd hear Nathan crying whilst Maurice was taking care of him, I couldn't hear God I could only hear my baby and couldn't concentrate on God.

Eventually I gave up the fight and told God that I really would come under my husbands covering, in every sense of the word, and asked him to give Maurice enough strength for both of us. When I submitted and stopped struggling and condemning myself, things got

much easier. Here again God showed me that *'his grace was sufficient'*. I just had to fall on his grace, I wasn't in a position to help myself.

When Nathan was 2 years old, to the very day, I bled during my second pregnancy. Being assured by the hospital nursing staff that I was probably rushing around too much after a 2 year old and needed a rest away from home for a few days, I went to be checked over. I was devastated to find that the child I'd been joyfully carrying had been dead in my womb for 4 weeks and needed to be removed. Not being a young mum, I feared that my chances for another pregnancy were very slim and tearfully begged God to give life to my dear little dead baby. But Maurice talked with me, helping me to face reality, and so allowed the surgeons to remove the dead child. *"God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord"*. I accepted his decision and *'his grace was sufficient'*.

Doors open ...

When I returned home from hospital I began to pray fervently that God would be kind to me and open my womb so that Nathan wouldn't be an only child. I begged and begged, it became a real issue with me. But then one day God opened my eyes to the stark reality of what I was doing ... I was putting pressure on him and not allowing him to exercise his own free will. Immediately I repented, realising that I had consciously accepted God's decision, but had subconsciously resented it. In an effort to prove to God

my change of heart I gave away all the large baby items I had tenderly kept and told him that I wanted his will, whatever that meant.

The very same week that I had cleared out everything to do with the baby, I was sick. Maurice immediately informed me that I was pregnant, but fearing to have my hopes dashed I dismissed his remark until he shared his secret with me. The Lord had recently woken Maurice from sleep to tell him that he was going to bless him with another son. Wow! Now I wasn't only pregnant, but I was carrying a son, and this was what God was telling Maurice he specifically desired for us, without our even praying or pleading. A week later God gave me a dream and told me to call this child Izaac, and I hadn't even had my pregnancy confirmed by a doctor!

Sure enough, Izaac was born in the normal way, and is my little laughing boy. When I accepted God's wisdom in my miscarriage from his left hand, he blessed me with his right hand. He had firmly shut the door to my request, but whilst I was walking away learning to thank him for his decision in this matter, he had opened a window.

## Sent to Coventry

Years ago, when I was a single working girl, I was employed as a 'Girl Friday' by a very large property development company who had decided to open up a branch work in Manchester and were recruiting staff. The job was really satisfying until a full compliment of employees had been recruited and everyone had been given their job description. I was appointed as Personal

Secretary to the Chief Surveyor who managed the very building we were using, and suddenly jealousies and rivalries which had been non-existent before began to appear.

The secretary who had been with the Company in another part of the country for a number of years and had been sent with her boss to get this branch in Manchester up and running, began to dislike me intensely and made my life unbearable. She was extremely vocal and at one point managed to get all the office staff to totally ignore me for quite a period. During this time only my boss and the Office Manager communicated with me. It was horrible. I'd cry in my prayer times and beg God to either get rid of her or find me a new job. But God kept reminding me that he had given me the job in the first place, and that this was my training ground.

I tried my best to love my enemies, bless those who cursed me and do good to those who spitefully used me, but I was very frayed and constantly had to ask God for his strength. Because I had been 'sent to Coventry' and ignored by my peers, I threw myself into my work and became very focused. My boss, seeing the pressure I was being put under and, fearing that I might leave the firm, removed me from the general office where all the other secretaries were. He literally put my desk in his own office so that I didn't have to come into contact with them.

It was totally unheard of and certainly showed preferential treatment which incensed the other

members of staff, and particularly this woman, even more. But he was determined to keep me working for him, and dedicated himself to making me happy. I became the most protected secretary in the company and in due time the secretary who had caused me so many problems left.

The 5 or 6 weeks annual holidays I received from my firm were times I used to go on ministry tours for the Lord, but the weeks became too few as more invitations for ministry came along. I shared my dilemma with my boss who assured me that the firm respected me so much that they had decided to pay me when I took extra time off to fulfil my engagements. Sometimes this was for whole months at a time.

However, there came a day when I felt just too embarrassed to accept all the concessions the firm were prepared to allow me. I had to leave, but not because I wanted to. The situation had vastly changed. I loved my job and had developed some great relationships with members of staff. But it was now God's time for me to go. Being sent from the firm with their blessing, I was told that if I was ever in need of employment in the future there would always be an open door if I decided to go back to them. God really did turn the whole thing around.

I just keep knocking

But the principle to keep in our minds here is that we must hold on in faith to anything that the Lord has specifically said to us. When I prayed about a job this

had been where the Lord put me so there was no point praying myself out of the job, because God had placed me in it. When the difficulties arose I had to think back and reflect on how I got there in the situation. God doesn't play games with his children. He is a good father and wants us all to come to maturity. That's why he gave apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists and pastors to the body of Christ - so that we could be brought to the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ. God wants us to become adults and not remain spoilt children forever. Unfortunately, it's often only the 'school of hard knocks' that shapes us up. So like Job we have to say that we accept everything from the hand of the Lord and bless him no matter what, because he knows what he is doing even if we are blind to it.

I've decided now not to suggest or tell God how to answer my prayers. I just keep on knocking and letting him know I have a difficult problem to solve. He can dream up the most fantastic answers, so why deprive myself of my 'Knight in shining armour' coming to my rescue with a breathtaking deliverance?



## Challenge Issue 53

From Do unto others

Matthew 7:12

This verse starts with the word 'therefore' which means that it is connected to the previous verses concerning asking, seeking, knocking, and does not stand alone. It is the conclusion to what Jesus has just said. If we want to receive 'good gifts' from our Father in Heaven, then we have to be like God towards others. Paul sums up the Law in Romans 13:8 "... but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law ... Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

It is sometimes said that in order to "love your neighbour as yourself" you must first "love yourself". But this is not a Christian thought, it comes from psychology. The spotty, overweight teenage girl is lying when she says she "hates herself". She loves herself. What she hates is the fact that she has spots and is overweight, it hurts her pride. If she really hated herself she would be happy with her spots and excess weight. Self-esteem is not the answer.

Anyone who increases their self love will, by definition, become more self-centred, and therefore less loving towards their neighbour.

## 12

# *Experience Is The Best Teacher*

We are all basically selfish. You don't think you are? Neither do I. But what actually happens is we usually look for ways **out** of doing things for others rather than the other way around. The proof that we have the right attitude in this area is if we don't feel as though we are putting ourselves out any more - you know, when the pain of making the effort has completely gone!

I can think of occasions in my life when I have really needed someone to be there and nobody was around. You see, I live in quite unique circumstances. I have been in the ministry for many years and don't really belong anywhere in particular. I mean to say, I am a member of a church nearby, but because I travel to different churches in different countries on such a regular basis, I am not really involved with people in the church where I am a member. I have lots of friends,

but they are all dotted around the country and world and, prior to the year 2000, were never actually with me when I desperately needed their practical help.

On my own

I remember when I had my first child, Nathan. Because he had been breech throughout my pregnancy he had to be delivered by a Caesarean Section. This, of course, involves major surgery and is quite a serious operation which leaves the patient very weak and unable to lift, or do anything at all which requires normal strength, as the stitches are liable to burst open. I didn't have any relationship at that time with any member of my family, nor did I have neighbours as I live in a conservation area where, to the left of me is a private hospital, and to the right, and all around, large houses or blocks of purpose built flats filled with students attending the Manchester University and they all live in their own grounds.

I was so distressed

The church weren't aware of my need and so I was left completely alone except for the midwives who called for an hour each day for about 2 weeks after Nathan's birth. There were times when I was so distressed I would cry hugging the baby. Post natal depression, however mild, plays a big part at this time too, and I couldn't get used to the hormonal changes that were going on inside my body. I'd always been so organised and particular where my housework and

home were concerned, but suddenly I found that I couldn't cope with everything and this added to my defeated feelings.

### I needed the experience

But all this was good training. Do you know why? We often can't understand what other people go through unless we have experienced in a similar way their pain or suffering in some measure. The fact that I have been through this situation and know what it's like to need someone in these circumstances makes me aware of the fact that others in this same position need my help. I never go past a lone woman with a child at the shops, or in the airport, without being aware that she needs some assistance. It doesn't matter how many other people are around, I'll always carry bags or do anything I can to help because I know her difficulty.

And what about looking after someone else's children for a few hours? There have been times I have really wanted to do some shopping for a pair of shoes or to buy some clothing for myself yet I found it impossible because the children put me under so much stress and wouldn't allow me to try things on. During these occasions I have invariably walked out of the shop without any purchases because I was so frustrated. There have been other times when I have felt so miserable and unwomanly just because of the way I looked - drab and un-cared for. All my time being spent on meeting the needs of the children and my husband, with little or none left over for myself. But

it's been good for me because now I can see where others need help.

## We all have blind spots

There are so many areas where we need to have our eyes opened to the needs of others. I must admit, I have had many, many blind spots. During these years of preaching the 'Sermon On The Mount' we have realised that the sermons are no good, either to preach them or listen to them, unless we work on the **practical application** of the things contained in them.

This is what really matters and this is where all our so-called professed Christianity falls down - we don't practice the preaching.

## Maurice exposed me

Maurice has done lots of practical things during his lifetime which have exposed many self-centred areas in me. For example there was a man in Scotland, Barry Barratt, who wanted Maurice to build a video edit suite in his grounds. He had been a very successful, business man before he had become a Christian. God radically changed him. So much so that, instead of continuing to build his empire, he poured his money into helping underprivileged children and the teenage and young community of his home town. The facilities he was planning to build in his grounds were for the local schools to use, free of charge, for the education of their students. His intention was that they should have hands on experience in producing their own News

Reels, and he gave them all Bibles so that the young people could research the accounts for themselves to re-create a Christian story board, like the good Samaritan, etc.

## Learning the hard way

Maurice took Alex, our ex co-worker, up to Scotland with him for weeks at a time until he had completely built and set up the whole video suite. Yet this business man never offered Maurice anything except accommodation when he was doing the work. No expenses for either his time or travel, nothing. I was quite put out because of how much we struggle financially living by faith. But Maurice kept telling me that God saw everything and would look after us. On the other hand I was quite miffed that this man, who knew all about business, and could well afford it, didn't even think that "the labourer was worthy of his hire"! But how wrong I was.

Over the time we knew Barry and his wife Isobel he shared with us some of his godly principles and we will never forget them. He believed that if anyone did something for God, they should do it without looking for payment, and they should do it from a willing heart. This was fine for him to say seeing as it was Maurice who had done all his work. But he also practised this principle himself and had spent fortunes in setting up many facilities for the benefit of young people, only to take his hands completely off the projects and hand them over for others to run without his interference.

His Christianity had been very practical and costly to himself, and that's what he expected of others who called themselves Christians.

## An attractive offer

When I was pregnant with my third child, Tamar, 'Sony' representatives telephoned Maurice to inform him of a special deal they had on some of their video equipment. They were either selling at half price, or totally trashing as tax write-offs, complete video edit suites, and were wondering if Maurice or anybody he knew would be interested in taking advantage of this phenomenal deal. Maurice made some phone calls to a few friends, one of whom was Barry Barratt, the man he had done the work for in Scotland. He was very interested in the deal so with some of his own personal money he bought a full video edit suite which he intended to install in the community centre in his home town. Because the building he wanted to install it into hadn't yet been completed, and there was nobody around at the time who could utilise this facility, Barry allowed Maurice to loan all the equipment for 6 months absolutely free of charge.

Maurice insured the equipment, as it didn't belong to us, and began making programmes, some of which have been shown on television. This equipment has been a tremendously valuable tool and has enabled us to spread the gospel in many different countries. Every so often Maurice would ring the man to find out if he wanted him to take the equipment to install it in his

premises. But each time Barry said that he wasn't yet ready and encouraged Maurice to continue using it.

We were thoroughly blessed to be able to use this equipment for 5 years in this way making all sorts of videos to promote the gospel. Then one day Barry phoned us to say that he had decided to allow us to keep it. We assured him that as far as we were concerned it was his and we would hand it back to him immediately with gratitude for all the time he had permitted us to use it, but he wouldn't hear of it. It was ours.

Again Barry proved his godly principles of giving to God from a willing heart to spread the gospel. But it also taught me a valuable lesson. It showed me that **'God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him'**.

## God is no man's debtor

Any efforts we make towards putting our Christianity into practice will not go unnoticed by God. The time and effort Maurice put into building Barry's video edit suite, without receiving any payment at the time, was rewarded years later ... with abundant interest!

Some time ago a group of people asked Maurice to speak at a house group. We were used to speaking to large congregations where we would invariably receive a ministry fee, but because it was a house group, with only a few people gathering together, nobody saw the need. Maurice went week after week at his own expense and again I thought he was being taken

advantage of. But he told me that God was our source and we shouldn't look to people.

As time went by certain people requested Maurice to start up more house groups on different nights of the week. There have been periods when he has had more house groups to attend than nights in the week would allow for, some as far as Scotland and London for just a handful of people, and I've often wondered whether it was worth all his effort. But we have seen God work in the lives of these people.

## Personal attention

We have seen some of them grow from buds into flowers under the teaching of the 'Sermon on the Mount' as their hunger for God was fed. They have become Christlike in their characters and have changed out of all proportion. There is nothing like personal attention, and that is what these house groups are being provided with. An environment where they can be taught and ask questions vital to their development and understanding.

I remember vividly, when I was just a teenager, my own pastor spending hours talking to me about God, the ministry, his vision, his godly principles ... and my life radically changed. I could think of nothing else but God. He was the only thing in my mind and heart that had any meaning. I'm certain that I'm in the ministry today because of the unselfish time that my pastor gave to me. He gave his precious time freely, at no cost to me, and because it was personal it met my individual need.

The bible says, “**freely ye have received, freely give**”, but to give freely we have to exercise our memory. Sadly it is difficult to be more than our experience, but because we have all been through difficult times and know how it feels to need and hurt, then we are prime candidates to “**do unto others as we would have had them do to us**”.



## Challenge Issue 54

### The Narrow Way

Matthew 7:14

This is a message to Christians, not to unbelievers. The wisdom in this chapter interprets itself. We need only understand the key words which are; 'strait', 'narrow', 'life', and 'few'. 'Strait' means tight, restricted, limited, confining. 'Narrow' means it doesn't get any better once you're through the gate. It always stays restricted. There's no room for deviation, doing your own thing, or taking along your own agendas, decisions or preferences.

Why should a narrow, restricted, awkward, confined way lead to life? Because Jesus walked that way, and we're following him. Jesus said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). To never be able to do your own will, what you want to do, is pretty restricting. And God's will was not easy for Jesus, for it was God's will that he went the way of death. There is never any fruit without death, without the seed first dying in the ground. And even when the tree grows up, without pruning you may get a little fruit, God's purpose is not a big tree, but much fruit - and that means pruning. The narrow way leads to life. Discipline leads to freedom. No-one was more free than Jesus, yet no-one was ever more restricted. The disciple's life may seem horribly restricting, yet they seem more free and content than people who have all the so-called 'freedoms' of wealth, health, success and everything that goes with the 'broad way'. Few Christians find it. No cross, no crown.

## 13

# *How Does The Squeeze Affect You?*

When I read through the article Maurice had written to see if I could write anything to complement it, I was in a dilemma. Could I think of any situations in my own life which could give you an indication as to what the strait and narrow way could mean, or can we only see this in a spiritual way? As I pondered, I could see many incidents which had thrown me *off* the strait and narrow, times when I had *conformed* to the world and been part of the system, you know, just doing what everyone else does although the things I did were not particularly what you would call sinful.

We all start out our journey, whether Christian or non-Christian, on the strait and narrow way. A child begins its life in a tightly restricted area, the womb, totally protected from outside elements. The birth is through an incredibly strait and narrow birth canal and

as soon as the child is born it is washed and swaddled in tight blankets, because this very restriction gives the baby security and comfort. But after that, the fight for independence begins and unless someone applies restrictions along the way, the child will become a selfish, wilful, inconsiderate hooligan who is a law unto itself.

## Christian freedom?

There is no freedom for the Christian. Jesus freed us from slavery to the devil by paying the price for our sin. But we have now been bought. We are not our own. We are now the property, servants, of the Lord Jesus Christ and have an obligation to fulfill the will of God in our bodies, minds and spirits.

If we don't do God's will, then we in actual fact have become rebellious, stealing our own life which is the property of God, so that we can live as we please.

But is the fact that we have no freedom a horrible situation to be in? If it is, then Jesus must have been the most miserable person ever to walk this earth because he said on numerous occasions that he did nothing of himself, he only did what the Father showed him to do. He didn't heal one sick person without his Father telling him to do it. He never spoke to anyone unless his Father told him to. He never went anywhere without his Father's permission. He was driven by the spirit of his Father into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and be tempted of the devil. He desperately pleaded with his Father in the garden of Gethsemene to be

released from giving his life on the cross ... “Any other way Father. You can do all things. Yet not my will, but yours be done.” Was Jesus miserable? Did he find the “Christian” life too hard, too restrictive, too narrow? I don’t think so. He said that his very meat (food) was to do the will of his Father in Heaven. He seemed to delight in the close communion and relationship which he had with his Father. He even neglected to sleep at night because being with God was so important. He was at peace when all around him was in turmoil, he wouldn’t even have bothered to still the storm if the disciples hadn’t woken him from his sleep. He was at peace with God at all times.

## My restrictions

I have cast my mind back over my life to see how I have reacted when I’ve been restricted from doing my own will by God. I remember on one occasion when I was about 23 years old and had courted a fascination for a very handsome, wealthy, worldly man who was paying me quite a great deal of attention. He had invited me out for the day. I knew I shouldn’t be with him, I was a Christian and he wasn’t. I knew I was playing with fire, but the fire at that time seemed warm and appealing and suddenly my Christianity seemed too restrictive and confining. I was young and wanted to enjoy myself. I accepted his invitation so he called for me in his flash car. I just hoped that nobody from my church saw me with him and consequently kept my head down whilst we were driving through the

neighbourhood. But when he said he had to call in at the office and the business he owned to pick something up, I just knew something was going to happen to ruin my plan.

## Freaked out

And I was right. When we arrived at the firm he owned and were getting out of his car, another vehicle rolled up. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw who was in it. It was the Pastor's son! He got out of his car and came over to me as I stared at him in disbelief. He motioned for me to wind the window down and then said he had come to take me home. I was mesmerised! You cannot imagine how I felt. I was embarrassed, frustrated, frightened, confused, angry, you name it, I was so many emotions rolled into one. I got out of the car I was in like someone sleepwalking and got into the brothers parked vehicle. My worldly boyfriend stood transfixed in bewildered amazement because I was just walking away from him – and he was so very, very wealthy, attractive and impressive!

## I wanted to be free

I remember vividly the journey home to my house. I was freaked out. I knew God was stopping me from getting into trouble, but to be quite honest, I wanted to get in trouble. I wanted to be free from God for a few hours. But He wouldn't release me. In those minutes I felt as though something sinister was happening to me. "This is nothing but satanic", I yelled, "God is supposed

to be a gentleman and never do anything we don't want Him to do. He would never take my free will away!" I was so confused because I had an understanding of God which wasn't true.

But then a strange feeling came over me. I suddenly felt very loved, very cared for and very special. Fancy God going to all that trouble to make sure I didn't do something I would regret! I felt those tight swaddling clothes wrapped around me and it made me feel incredibly secure.

## Decisions and consequences

If God has fathered you then don't expect him to let you get away with doing what you want. Like any loving parent, he will keep close tabs on you and make you feel very uncomfortable at times to let you know you are overstepping the mark. The problem really comes when you have matured spiritually enough in his view to make your own decisions and face the consequences your actions may bring. God writes his laws in your heart and mind and will not give you peace while ever you are pondering about what decision you are going to make, until you have made your choice. When you have come to your decision, either to follow his will or your own, then conviction ceases and you have peace. If you have made the right decision then this peace is wonderful and will bring the "peaceable fruits of righteousness". But if you have made the wrong choice, this "peace" means that God is not striving with you any longer.

You have hardened up and he is “handing you over to a reprobate mind” because you have decided not to listen to his voice. God will never force you to serve him. He is always seeking voluntary surrender from a heart that is filled with love for him.

I face decisions every day. My walk with God requires me to feed my new nature and starve my old nature. Hundreds of situations crop up every day where I have to choose which path to follow. I never buy newspapers or magazines because I know that when I read the scandal, gossip and all the other smutty things that find their way onto the pages, it only feeds my old nature. But sometimes, when I am in the dentists’ waiting room I will be tempted to pick up a magazine just to pass the time, and when I have done this I’ve felt eyes on the back of my head as though ‘big brother was watching me’.

Mostly I am grateful

Sometimes it has really annoyed me that I don’t feel free, but most of the time I am really grateful that God is keeping my conscience towards him soft, because whenever we harden up to his voice he will stop speaking. “But we’re all human!”, I’ve heard people say. Yes, that’s true. So was Jesus whilst he had an earthly body, that’s why he said, “**Not my will, but Thine be done.**” If we are to allow God to live through us, then we have to deny our human desires and do only the things we know will please God. When you are about to do something, ask yourself whether

you would be happy or embarrassed if Jesus was to be visibly standing beside you witnessing everything you did.

Whether it's keeping the wrong company, doing the wrong things, going to the wrong places or saying and listening to the wrong things, allow yourself to be soft to God. Harden not your hearts like the children of Israel did, but allow God to have his will in your life. **“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”** (Romans 12:1-2).

Restricting? Yes. Demanding? Yes. But it will bring the real peace that only God can give ... **“My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth”**. Worldly peace comes from blotting out his voice when we hear it and eventually God stops speaking to us, but then he hands us over to a reprobate mind - he leaves us to get into as much trouble as we want but will judge us severely on the day of reckoning.

On the contrary the peace that Jesus gives to those who respond to his voice is real and true because we are right with God, and we are promised that the experience of this peace passes all understanding. Let's face it, in this troubled world we all desperately need this kind of peace.



Challenge Issue 55

The Broad Way

Matthew 7:13

Jesus is talking to disciples. All Christians are on one of these 2 roads, the narrow way or the broad way. We need to note the key words: 'wide', 'broad', 'many' and 'destruction'. The gate is so wide you are totally free of restrictions, so broad that you are not even aware you are on it. Many, the majority of Christians lead this easy, no cost lifestyle. It costs little to build with wood, hay and stubble. But the price at the end is heavy. The man is safe, but his work is destroyed.

These Christians have all the right words, they believe that their belief is enough; but it isn't. Many Christians believe in discipleship, affirm it, even preach it, but don't live it. We are experts at talking ourselves around it, and justifying ourselves, and the more we do, the more blind we become, until there are 1000 miles of distance between our words and our lifestyle. And yet we alone cannot see it. We carry on in our conceited opinions, our consciences seared against the voice of the Spirit. Materialism is the broad way in the parable of the sower where some seed fell into good soil. They grew into strong, sturdy plants, but became unfruitful. But that was the whole point of planting the seed. God wants fruit which comes from the narrow, restricted way, and wants fruit that will abide forever.

# 14

## *Dare To Be A Daniel*

You don't have to be a Christian to know what is right and wrong. Somehow deep inside everyone, there is something inbuilt which sets off an alarm bell when we are tempted to sin. When I was very young and impressionable I was lured by friends into stealing from stores. I never took anything valuable or large, just sweets, bits of make-up or underwear, but my heart used to beat so fast and loudly that I thought everyone around me was well aware of what I was doing and that at any moment I would be discovered.

I knew it was wrong, and so did my friends who were certainly not Christians, but it seemed so prudish to be a 'goodie goodie' all the time. God, in his mercy however, did allow me to be caught by a store detective who took me to the shop manager where I was threatened with the police and given a thorough 'ticking off'. That incident miraculously gave me the backbone I needed to say no to future stealing

expeditions because I knew God had let me off lightly. Next time he might not be so considerate to my feelings and I could end up in real trouble.

## Follower of fashion

One particular thing I really did struggle with though, as I grew up through my teens and twenties, was fashion. It is incredible how fashion dictates to everyone, no matter how old or young they are.

If you think you are an exception just look at a 1920's war film to see how much things have changed, from hairstyles and hats, right the way down to shoes, and then look at your wardrobe to see if you still have some of the old gear there ... if you haven't, you too have conformed!

As I grew up I found it harder to be 'unfashionable' than it was to be a Christian. Mini skirts, hot pants, low necked dresses and tops, knee length leather boots and stiletto heels were all the rage when I was in my early 20's, and even though I was freezing and suffering with rheumatism in my legs due to the cold and damp of winter, I preferred to wear 2 and sometimes 3 pairs of tights beneath my tiny skirt than wear longer clothes. It's a wonder I never caught pneumonia ... or worse still, was raped!

When you start out as a Christian you seem to automatically know in your own heart what is, and what isn't, acceptable in Gods eyes. Even non-Christians know very well how Christians ought to live. It's very sad to note that even though they are prepared

to go the whole hog and do what God requires, all too often freshly cleaned out new converts to Christianity are corrupted from having a pure heart towards God when they observe the looseness of all the other mature Christians who have long since given up the good fight and allowed their standards to plummet by compromising with the world.

### Life comes from the heart

The world has a terrible pull and demands, not requests, that we conform to it's standards. David wrote in the Psalms that we should **“guard diligently the heart for out of it are the issues of life.”**

If we maintain a pure heart before God and allow him to illuminate where we are at fault without defending our actions, we have a chance of walking on that strait and narrow pathway which is exceedingly restrictive. If we conform to what everyone else in the church is doing, and follow the example of those who are walking unconsciously on the broad way, we will become desensitised and the strictness of the narrow way will seem ridiculous. “We are only human, after all”, was once said to me.

### Terrible confession

What a shameful confession for a mature Christian. That means they are complacently walking in the old nature and forgetting their obligation to walk in the new nature. No wonder there is often no difference between the church and the world.

I remember when I was a little girl in Sunday School that we used to sing a song, the words went like this: “Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm, and dare to make it known.” Sounds great, but is unbelievably difficult to do. Especially in church environments when surrounded by easy going Christians. We try our best to let the people of the world see that Christians are no different from them, that we too can have fun and we are not 'killjoys'. We do whatever they do and say, we stress that they don't have to give anything up to be a disciple, Jesus came to give us life, and *that more abundantly*. In fact the only difference between us and them is that we have Jesus and they haven't.

## We needed attention

Many years ago I was in a Christian Music Group comprising 4 boys and myself. I was a lead singer who sometimes played keyboard and percussion and the other members sang backing vocals and played guitars and drums, etc. We did some touring in the UK and Holland and made a bit of a name for ourselves in church circles. I remember in particular one concert we did because this time God had something to say. We had just finished performing the first half and, after taking a break and changing clothes, came on for the second act. But I'm afraid this met with disapproval by James B. Hosier, an American evangelist who was in the audience. We thought we would surely have impressed him with our professionalism as in the first half we had

all worn something dark, but in the second the lads had come out wearing tight jeans and white vests and I was wearing a tight, white top and skin tight trousers. We thought we looked very modern and ‘great’ and thought this preacher was being rather stuffy. When I asked what was wrong with what we had done he said in a very mild, kind way, that our appearance didn’t glorify God. And that was all he said. But Maurice (who was the leader of the group) and I couldn’t get away from his words and we knew in our heart of hearts that we were just showing off our talents and bodies, copying the world, and that it really didn’t glorify God, it glorified us. I’m grateful that I can say we never appeared like that again. But we had to go through many more tests and trials before the world was knocked out of us and we understood more fully what it means to ‘minister’ in song and music.

## Music is not God

Music has become so important in our modern churches that I’m afraid the platform is in actual fact the stage for many egotistical, self-centred and worldly Christians who just want an audience to perform before. They probably could never become successful with their music in the world, but nice, worldly Christians who come to sit in the pews week after week are not as difficult to please as those who pay good money for their entertainment.

I’m sure Daniel was not the only God fearing man of his day, but because of who he was, and the position

he was in, he had to be *seen* to be uncompromising. Others who served God must have prayed in secret, but he did it openly. Oh that we Christians could hear God and uncompromisingly hold on to what we had been told no matter how others in the world or church lived.

It is not easy to obey God, there are always those who would oppose us and make life difficult. But then we say so glibly that we want to be God pleasers and not men pleasers, don't we?

Maurice and I have asked God to show us how we have conformed to the worlds standards so that we can '**come out from among them and be separate**'. God has revealed many things to us and we have simply, and sometimes painfully, had to change and be true to our convictions. We refuse to take out insurance policies to protect us against theft, loss or accident. Where it is unlawful not to have insurance, we have complied. But because of this stand we have taken, God has been able to manipulate our lives. For instance, when all our musical equipment was stolen, God told Maurice that he wanted him to be a preacher instead of a musician, and our whole lives changed.

## Communion

Some time ago God personally spoke to me about the communion. The bible says that Jesus broke the bread and wine to establish a new covenant. The bread was obviously unleavened as no leaven was allowed in any Jewish houses for a whole week before Passover, and yet in many churches leavened bread is distributed.

Jesus told the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, saying that it was like yeast hidden in the dough that spread throughout the whole lump, and that the leaven was symbolic of hypocrisy. So what is the Church saying? Are they advocating that it is OK to allow hypocrisy in the Church. Jesus said that he was the true vine and the vineyard represented God's chosen people, and we who are not Jews but have accepted Christ have been grafted onto the vine, therefore grapes are extremely important symbols. Yet often blackcurrant juice or some other drink is given. Richard Wurmbrand, who was imprisoned in Romania for his faith, used bread and water saved from his meagre prison rations because he had nothing else to use. But our circumstances are completely different. One Church I know of actually distributed strawberries and Ferrero Rocher chocolates to represent Christ's body and pineapple juice to represent Christ's blood because they thought these dainties would be more palatable to the people. What has the Church come to if all we are concerned about is pandering to the taste buds of the congregation?

## Consistent symbols

There were other things concerning communion that God also brought to my attention and I felt very challenged and convicted. I promised him that I would only take public communion if the symbols were right, and I was in unity with those I was sharing it with. It makes sense really because we would all complain if we

were sprinkled with water at a Water Baptismal Service instead of being fully immersed, as sprinkling just doesn't, and couldn't, ever symbolise what baptism really means.

## Opting out


Maurice and I send our children to a fee paying Christian school because we cannot allow the heathen to educate them. Especially in this permissive, modern age where evolution is taught as fact and not theory, and they are very likely to have homosexual or lesbian teachers instructing them at some point because of our laws concerning discrimination. Our children are too important to hand over to Godless people. We believe that the consistent lifestyle taught and implemented in a Christian home, church and school is a must for our family.

I am not suggesting for one minute that you do what we have done, you need to have your own convictions for that. We have been criticised and even condemned for many of the stands we take, but if we weren't we would wonder whether we were on this narrow way or not. After all, if every other Christian around was doing exactly what we were, that would be a sure sign we were on the broad road ... wouldn't it?



Reuben, the gypsy who supplied us with the duck, outside his trailer with Maurice.





Challenge Issue 56  
Wolves In Sheep's Clotheing - Part 1  
Matthew 7:15

Jesus tells us that there are people who will pull us away from the narrow way and onto the broad way. "Beware" - this is something we must take very seriously. We must not think ourselves above the danger. We may think that the church, the 'sheepfold', is a safe place. Nothing attracts the wolves like the sheepfold!

The most subtle of the false prophets are the ones no-one suspects, those who find approval within mainstream Christianity. They are the most dangerous thing in the body of Christ, and the least recognised. They are wolves inwardly, and even they themselves may not be aware of what they are. In fact, they are sheep, with a wolf's heart. One of the things that makes them so deceptive is that they are deceived themselves. Their heart is wrong. Somewhere they have allowed covetousness and hypocrisy to get in. The thorns have sprung up, "the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entered in" (Mark 4:19), and choked the good seed.

Many sheep feel well fed, accepted and valued in the houses of false prophets, with all their talk of freedom, celebration and victory. But they don't realise they are being fleeced and devoured. Signs and wonders are not the measure by which we test godliness. A false prophet is genuinely a prophet, but we judge them by their fruit.

# 15

## *Spiritual 'Radar'*

If there is one thing lacking in the church of Christ today, it is the gift of discernment. Many people seem intent on seeking God for gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, etc., but very few desire to know which voice they are listening to ... God's or the devil's; or where something is coming from ... God or the devil. Surely, this should be of the utmost importance to every Christian, especially as so much is being spoken about us being in the last of the last days. The bible is full of warnings concerning what will happen during these perilous times, how there will be such great deception upon the earth that if it were possible even the very elect would be deceived. Friends, it is vital that we beg of God this supernatural gift that we may not be deceived by our enemy. Jesus did not say, "Beware of false prophets, which **may** come to you in sheep's clothing ..." , He said they **would** come, and we are to beware lest we be taken in by their crafty, deceptive

manner, because unless God reveals their true inward state it will be completely hidden from us.

I can think of the time, many years ago, listening to a Christmas album sung by Barbra Streisand. She sang some lovely songs and carols putting real emotion and feeling into them. But as I sat in the semi-darkness of my room and closed my eyes listening, I could feel an anointing as she sang about the birth of Jesus Christ.

I was so touched that I was absolutely certain that she must have become a Christian. How else would she be able to put such spirit into what she sang? Fortunately I was sharing this with a mature Christian who tried to explain to me the difference between 'spiritual' and 'soulish' music. There is a world of difference between the two.

## Spiritual Radar

As human beings we are sensitive to many unseen things. I lead my children on sometimes by saying that mums (especially me) have been blessed with a radar system, and we know what our children are up to even when we don't see them doing anything with our physical eyes. Many times, when my children were small, the house would go really quiet and instinctively I would look for them, only to find them pulling wallpaper off the walls, pouring salt all over the table and floor, tearing books, and even unravelling audio or video cassettes. My own mother had the same sense, she would always appear in the kitchen just at the very moment I was applying the rolling-pin to the Christmas

Cake she was preparing to ice so that I could remove, yet again, another layer of the deliciously sweet, yellow marzipan. My children try their best to sneak up on me, but I can always just sense their presence in the room and spoil their prank. Thank God for 'radar'!

## First impressions

But do we take note of these senses that we have been blessed with, or dismiss them as wrong thoughts? On occasions I have seen a person for the very first time and had first impressions concerning them. Sometimes, I have been quite shocked with what I've thought and, like a good Christian, have put the thought out of my mind telling myself that I am critical and judgmental.

Some years ago Maurice and I were invited to preach and sing at a church in Lancashire. We had never been to the church before and had never met the minister, but when he was leading the meeting from the platform I remember feeling quite repulsed by his manner for it was very effeminate and insipid. I shared with Maurice what I had thought and felt quite embarrassed at even thinking it, let alone sharing it, so dismissed it out of my mind. We chatted to the minister after the meeting and seemed to get along very well with him and I felt even more convinced that I just had a bad mind.

Not long after we were invited to preach and sing at this church again. But this time, when we arrived the minister came to us to apologise. He wanted me to sing, but, unfortunately for Maurice, the Lord had laid on this minister a specific message which he felt

he should give that very morning and asked if Maurice would mind not preaching and permit him to preach instead. Not a problem to Maurice, of course, so he just supported me on this occasion. The minister preached a very good sermon on prayer and both Maurice and I felt that it was really anointed by God. So this again confirmed to me that I had been terribly wrong in my assessment of this dear Christian man.

I couldn't believe it

Arrangements were made for us to visit the church again in the near future, but this time the minister was absent. He hadn't said he would be away so I asked a member of the church where he was. "In prison!" was the reply. I was stunned. Apparently, this minister had been sexually abusing young boys in his Sunday School for a long time and the church, as well as his own family, were shocked and deeply hurt by this terrible deception and very fearful for their children ... And yet I had felt an anointing on his sermon and that, more than anything, had made me dismiss my first impressions of this man!

I now know the answer to this dilemma which I initially had. I once read in a book that you mustn't refuse a letter just because the postman's boots were dirty. In other words, God can use anyone and anything to convey his message if he is trying to say something to you. God used an ass to speak to Baalim in the Old Testament, but that doesn't mean that the ass was holy or a good Christian. Jesus said, "Beware!" If you

discern something in your spirit when you first meet a person, seek the Lord about it. It could save you heartache later on if that initial impression was from God.

### My mums experience

When I was a young girl and still living at home with my parents, I remember my mother giving hospitality to a problemed young man. He had recently become a Christian and professed to be born again. At the time I was one of 4 children living there, the eldest was 14 years old and the youngest was around 18 months old. This young man had been with us for a few weeks but one night my mother felt an incredible urgency to get him out of the house. There wasn't any particular reason for this other than she just had this inner knowledge that something terrible would happen if he stayed. So, even though it's possible to feel quite condemned for this type of behaviour, she got him out of the house. A few days later this man stabbed and murdered a young boy. Who knows what God saved our family from? **"Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord'..... Then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you' ...!"**

### Another example

Years ago, Maurice, his father and myself were invited to conduct a crusade in Scotland. The man who had invited us, whom we had never met before, was the superintendent of a large denomination. Maurice and

I arrived at the church ahead of his father only to be greeted by the assistant minister, who seemed to treat us in a very curt, critical and offhand manner before taking us to the main minister who was in his office.

It would be quite difficult to describe the officious attitude of these men, who seemed bent on impressing us with their efficiency and business manner. The minister continued dictating letters into his Dictaphone handset and let us twiddle our thumbs for quite a while waiting for him to finish. I must admit, I was somewhat amused because I was very familiar with office procedure, having been a personal assistant to managing directors, and my first impressions of this man was that he was arrogant, a terrible show off and didn't know what he was doing. Again, I condemned myself for these awful un-Christian thoughts and tried to be humble.

## Out in the open

The crusade was tremendously blessed by God and I know that a good work was done in many hearts and lives. But after the meetings had finished, a young man, who was the son of the couple who were accommodating us, came crying to me as he was afraid to share his problem with anyone else. Apparently he was being sexually abused by a couple of male neighbours and was bleeding. But then it came out that he was also being abused, along with other boys in his youth group, in the church vestry, by the minister's own son who was the youth leader, .

We delicately shared his problem with his parents who immediately called the minister in for help. But it seemed that this was a known problem to the minister, who had done his utmost to sweep his son's tendencies under the carpet, even going as far as to getting his son married off so that all appearances seemed good. But his son had not changed.

The minister was so worried about keeping his good name that he issued a statement to all the churches in his denomination that Maurice and I were trouble makers and had us banned. Instead of dealing with his son who was his real problem, he blacked us!

Not very long after this incident the police arrested his son, who was found 'cottaging' in a public place, and sent to prison.

## We all need discernment

Ask for the spirit of discernment. Paul said, **“Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ.”** We need to follow the examples of men who are serving God and are in a position of leadership, but unless we have discernment, we will not know whether they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Ask God to give you the opportunity to see their real fruit so that you are not deceived.



Challenge Issue 57  
Wolves in Sheeps clothing - Part 2  
Matthew 7:15 - .

"Beware", says Jesus, these false prophets are in the church. They are the ministers of the broad way. The last days are the days of deception, and these are the most deceptive people in the church, ministers of Satan transformed into ministers of righteousness ... But you will always, without fail, know them by their fruit.

'Cain' means 'possession'. Cain slew his brother. Why is Cain an example of a false prophet? Because he chose to serve God in his own way, the way he wanted. He went on to build the first city, his own environment, where he could continue to do what he chose. False prophets today purpose the same thing. Serve God and please yourself.

Balaam (Num. 22) was a prophet. He heard from God. But he was greedy for reward and wanted his reward more than he wanted truth. Eventually God gave him permission to go his own way, but "God's anger was kindled because he went" (v:22). God does the same today. He apparently blesses what the false prophets and the people do, but his anger is kindled. It is no coincidence that Balaam resurfaces in the letters to the churches about the last days. Balaam is back! In these examples we see self operating against God in a spiritual disguise. They have shifted sides and become ministers of Satan (2 Cor. 11:15). They are the most deceptive and dangerous element in the kingdom today.

## 16

# *Is There a Wolf Cub In You?*

I think everyone has the potential characteristics, which are the seeds of the false prophets, of Cain, Balaam and others such as Core. Maurice talked about these people in this issue of *Challenge*, yet it is hard to detect what is in us without revelation, as we are all brilliant at justifying our actions. And we either come through and progress to a safer plateau or else justify what we are doing by making out that wrong is right. But as the Bible says, **“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”** (Proverbs 14:12).

I never imagined that I could have a career in singing when I was a child, it was way out of my reach. I saw people on the television and imagined myself in their shoes, but mother would say, “They had to sleep with the director to get there!”, or, “They have to show

their legs and body!” Consequently, as I was chubby and had moral values, I realised that show business was out of bounds for me as a Christian. But it’s amazing how we can substitute a church platform for a worldly stage.

### God-given talent

I’ve sung almost since the day I cut teeth, as teachers at school noticed my obvious talent and both pushed, and encouraged me into the public eye. I was genuinely embarrassed about my size and hated standing in front of people dressed in my white shirt, school tie and the pleated skirt, which was so unflattering. But the teachers made me feel as though I was letting the whole school down if I made a fuss and I ended up singing solos for inter-house school festivals as well as school competitions, more often than not coming away with first prize for these events. My public success at school helped me enormously to overcome my inferiority complex, and I realised that I really did have a God-given talent. I teamed up with a black girl at my church, named Caroline Miller, and we were kept busy with engagements singing duets at various Church Conventions for a couple of years.

### Pride begins to show

At the age of 16 I joined a band in my church. This was different to anything I’d ever done before as I now belonged to a serious group of musicians who played as well as sang. We wrote our own material and

took many bookings in the UK as well as abroad, and advertised with posters and handbills our availability to take engagements, and indeed were paid for our services. Because I was now working in an office during the day and involved with the band (all male except for me) in my free time, I did something about my size and slimmed down. This had a dramatic effect on me. Instead of covering up as I had always done before, I now avidly followed fashion and showed off my assets. In a way I felt that 'my public had a right' to this image. We began to go into recording studios and produce records and cassettes, and make a name for ourselves. We had big plans, big ideas of what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go.

### The greedy way

The bookings we received were from a variety of venues, but we particularly liked to go to large churches or concert halls because we were more likely to sell our albums, which helped tremendously to pay back the costs we had initially laid out and also buy better equipment. We would often judge a church by the amount it paid us. If they were generous they were praised, but if they were stingy they were almost despised. The greedy way of Balaam was in our hearts right from the outset and we didn't even recognise it.

We wanted fame, recognition, and often even wondered about performing in clubs ... singing Christian as well as the expected secular songs, of course! Our idea was that if we became famous then the world

would listen to our testimony and we would make an impact on society. But for some reason (God!) this never really materialised as Maurice and I could never feel completely free in our consciences. But we brought as much of the world as we could into our 'act', without actually going there physically. We wrote music which we felt would be acceptable to non-Christians, had stage lighting and effects, moved about on the stage as much as we dared without being too provocative, and wore the the most fashionable clothing. At one point I even went as far as becoming anorexic (before God mercifully delivered me from this evil sickness) because I was so vain and concerned about my 'public image'.

## Left alone

Unfortunately, the guys, one by one, left for various reasons and Maurice and I ended up on our own with his youngest sister who had recently joined us. His other sister and her boyfriend joined too and the group now entertained with drama as well as music. I must admit I enjoyed what we did immensely, it was great fun. We did lots of witty, comical sketches which I threw myself wholeheartedly into, revelling in the laughter and appreciation of the congregations we performed before. It was so rewarding to have an audience to display our talents before and it really did feed our egos. But only on the dramatic performance of 'The Crucifixion' did I ever feel the presence and awe of God, and for that reason alone we still do it to this day.

It didn't take long before this group disintegrated too, and Maurice and I were left completely on our own. But we still recorded and travelled with his father, who was an international evangelist, until he retired and then we were entirely alone. Nevertheless, we were not daunted and pursued what we believed God had called us to. All this time we were very serious about God and believed with all our hearts that we were doing his will, serving him in spirit and truth. We even came to the place where we could see our own greed for success and felt that we had to do something to prove to God, and ourselves, that we were not in this 'ministry' to make money. We genuinely wanted to minister. So we agreed that wherever we performed we would give our albums away free of charge and trust God to provide for all our needs.

It didn't work

This sounded great and very noble in theory, but it proved to be a disaster as young kids would be snapping them up and the older, more serious and responsible people were too embarrassed to ask for free goods. Then there was the problem that people thought that if we were not selling our albums then they must be of very inferior quality. We couldn't win, thus we couldn't get our ministry out. It was then that we hit on the idea of selling our albums as cheaply as possible, stipulating that all our material was non-copyright, and to give them away whenever we felt led to. This has worked well ever since and God has miraculously looked after us financially over the years.

But there came a day when, quite surprisingly, God told me to give up everything I was doing in the church. This I did not want to do as it was my life. But I know God's voice when he speaks and he left me in no doubt that he had spoken to me. Then something wonderful happened.

## A blessed vision

One Sunday morning after the service, a black lady Ida Mills, who had been a member for years, asked me why I was no longer singing or playing the organ in the church. I abruptly said that God had told me not to. I expected that she would have been shocked, but it was I who was shocked because she told me that God had given her a vision concerning me. She said I had been in the limelight for too long and had become proud and arrogant. I had to be knocked off my pedestal and humbled before God could use me properly. But then she went on to say that she had been fasting and praying for me! I accepted what she said without any nasty thoughts or feelings because up to this point nobody had ever said that they loved or cared about me enough to fast for me.

Once I was off the platform, it wasn't long before I was out of the church as the whole situation turned itself around on me. Because there had been no public announcement from the Pastor that I was resigning from my position in the church, people imagined that I had stopped ministering because I was under church discipline for some misconduct. But the truth was

that the Pastor had told me that he did not accept my resignation, this was my job in the church and I could take it back up again whenever I wanted to. But the criticism and rumours that went round the church were so hard to cope with that I ended up leaving the church.

This was the lowest point I have ever reached in my Christian walk. Nothing before or since has ever matched up to this trial. I didn't want to know those who called themselves 'Christians' as I thought they were all tarred with the same brush - love you when you are in favour, and ignorantly judge and accuse you when you drop out of the limelight. But I have also come to recognise this period as the greatest blessing I have ever received from the hand of God, because it was now just me and him, and I had to find him on my own without any props of church or ministry.

## A new start

I had to accept the fact that for all these years God had used me but now he was putting me on the shelf because I had served my purpose - it was now time for him to use others. 'Every dog has its day', I was 30 years old and maybe God now considered me 'past it'.

The pain of rejection began to ease as I found, after a couple of years, another church and once again began to build up my relationship with God and other Christians. I found a job and threw myself into that with vigour and enthusiasm. Then out of the blue, 3 years later, the minister of the church I was attending found out that I was a singer and asked me to sing

during a church meeting. The minister was so pleased with my ministry that he asked me to do a concert. The very first song I sang during that concert revealed in a dramatic way the difference between performing and ministering.

## Ministry, not entertainment

I had never sung like this before. As I sang the opening bars of my first song the people disappeared from my view and I was transported in my spirit into heaven. I looked up into the very face of God as I sang ‘Oh how I love Thy law’ from Psalm 119, and knew that I was singing for God’s ears and not the people’s. This was what God had wanted all the time, my spirit to be wrapped up in his as I sang for his pleasure. For all those previous years I had been conscious of the people and of where my voice could get me – it was the fruit of my labours like Cain’s, but not what God had wanted and was therefore, unacceptable. The bible says that ‘those who worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth.’

## Taking what is God’s

Years ago Maurice Maurice taught jazz improvisation and hoping to educate me in music took me to a concert performed by Stefan Grapelli the famous Jazz violinist. At the end of the ‘show’ (and that’s all it is really – an opportunity to ‘show’ off talent) Stefan stood on the stage for ages whilst people applauded and whistled, shouting for encores. As he bowed time after time,

each time he lifted his head I could sense him soaking up all the praise and adulation. My spirit squirmed as I realised he was taking to himself something which belonged only to God. In fact, he was making himself out to be a god, and that is a very dangerous thing to do. When King Herod accepted praise from the people, after giving a speech which sounded as though it had been spoken by a god, he was struck with worms and died (see Acts 12:21-23). Power and praise is dangerous, because it appeals to pride; and lust for power exists in most men's hearts. It drove Korah (Numbers 16) to rebellion, which is a fruit of the false prophets.

### Don't steal the glory

We must never take to ourselves what rightfully belongs to God. Since witnessing personally what was really going on with Stafan Grapelli at that concert, I have determined never to accept applause when I have sung in churches. My aim is to sing for God's pleasure and I must never be praised for doing that; it is my duty and privilege. Sometimes people have said they are applauding God, maybe so, but you would be amazed at how the applause affects the performer. It feeds pride and ego, and if you really cared for the spiritual welfare of the person on the platform you would do better to show your appreciation to God in another way.



Challenge Issue 58

The Two Trees

Matthew 7:17-20

Christians habitually make the wrong choice and eat the wrong fruit. We've been brought up on it and we're used to it. It's the false prophets who give us the wrong fruit, we're taken in by their deceit, because it involves the knowledge of good. It's all about morality and thought-out choices: man's ideas of goodness, religion, Christianity and even discipleship. It allows Christianity to become a moral debate or an issue of conscience instead of simple obedience to the commands of Jesus.

The roots of these trees are in our hearts. The false prophets once ate from the tree of life, but somewhere they erred. They were disobedient, they began to go the way God did not want them to go. Perhaps they allowed the thorns (the cares of this life, and the love of money), to choke and deceive them.

Which tree have you been eating? You may well say, "The woman ... gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:11). You're right; it was the woman - Babylon, the harlot. She got you eating of the tree of conscience and of moral choices. But now it the time to stop eating and get back to the tree of life!

# 17

## *Diabolical Competition*

You'd think that for a Christian there would be nothing simpler than doing what God said. But it can be really tough because God is always trying to find out what is motivating us. We can say with our mouths that we love God with all our hearts, but the truth is proved when we are tried and tested. Are we really willing to obey God? Are we prepared for the confusion, disappointment and pain it causes those we love when they don't understand why we do what we do? God makes sure we are placed into these situations because he wants to know how far we are prepared to go in our walk with him. It is also valuable for us to see where our sticking points are, so that we can be real with him in our prayers.

I was 26 years old and for quite a while I had been feeling the 'call' to leave secular employment and work for God full time. There was a big problem though ... I lived alone in a flat. If I had been living

at home with my parents, or married to some wonderful, hard working and loving man, that would have been a different matter entirely. But I lived alone and had to work to pay my rent, food bills and other expenses.

I had been battling through my problem for some time wondering how I was going to work it out. Prayer times had been very difficult because I felt that I had been shown to do something, but hadn't been shown how to do it.

Eventually, one morning before leaving for work, I really got desperate with God and asked him earnestly to show me the way forward. I was prepared to stay in prayer all morning if necessary to get my answer. I spoke in tongues and God in his mercy took me seriously and began to show me a vision.

## Meeting God

As I spoke in tongues I saw myself walking through some huge doors and was in a massive room. At the other end of the room, right in front of me, God was seated on his throne with an enormous outstretched eagle towering above his head. I slowly progressed towards him until I was right at the base of the steps leading up to his throne. I threw myself down onto my knees in absolute awe and stopped speaking in tongues. At this point, because I was exactly where I needed to be, I spoke in my own language and poured out all that was in my heart to him, telling him of the problems I was facing yet wanting to do his will.

After I had exhausted all that was in my heart God rose from his throne, came down the steps, and stretching out his hand lifted me to my feet. He linked my left arm through his right arm and walked me to the door through which I had entered. All the time we were walking together he made me feel as though I was in the company of a really great friend, as he was smiling and talking easily with me. When we reached the doors they opened by themselves and, putting a ring on my finger and an umbrella into my hand, God told me to jump. I looked through the doors and incredulously found that there was nothing there – I was standing on the ledge of a cliff with a sheer drop in front of me. God had said, "Jump", so I jumped. The umbrella opened out and, as I held it above me, I felt the wind take hold of it and I was carried away, with absolutely no support, in total safety.

I was so sure that God had given me the answer I was searching for that I went to work and handed my notice in that very day. Sure enough, because I had obeyed God and not relied on reason, God provided for me immediately and I began to literally live by faith as I worked for him.

## Unexpected Instructions

When you start obeying, God's voice becomes easier to recognise, but the tests usually get tougher. Not only did God tell me to resign from all the activities in the church but he also told me to change my surname to Barratt. I knew in my heart what God was doing, he

was cutting me off from one source and grafting me into another, as he wanted to change my identity. But how on earth can you try to explain something like that to anyone else without them thinking you are bitter and hurt? I knew an action like this would meet with hostility, to say the least, and I was afraid to do it. Although my parents and I had been estranged for years, I really didn't see the need to rub salt in any wound and knew that this would cause them to think I was taking this course to get back at them.

## I finally give in to God

But this wasn't the case at all, I had lived apart from them for years and was no longer affected by family squabbles. Because I couldn't see the need or logic for this action I didn't do anything about it for a long time and tried to carry on as normal. But God kept speaking to me and wouldn't let me get peace. After a couple of years struggling over this issue I finally gave way and changed my name by Deed Poll – and then I really quaked, waiting for the backlash! But I knew I had obeyed God and at least had peace with him. Nobody understood my actions, but then it didn't concern anybody else anyway.

Five years after changing my name I married Maurice, the Pastor's son, and my name became Barratt again. I have often wondered why God, who knows the future, didn't just wait a while and let everything be done reasonably and easily. But that doesn't seem to be the way God works with some people. Jesus said

that unless you were willing to forsake everything and everyone for his sake then you were not worthy to be his disciple (Luke 14;26).

Poor Adam was faced with a terrible dilemma not long after he was created. Genesis 2:16-18 says, **“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make an help meet for him.”** It was after this commandment that God made the animals (first) and then Eve. Verse 23 shows how smitten Adam was when Eve was presented to him. **“And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be call Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”**

Eve or God?

Notice the commandment not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not given to the animals or Eve, but to Adam, and he was meant to relay this law to everyone else. Imagine his dilemma when Eve coveted the wisdom to be like God spoken of by the serpent and desired to eat of the forbidden fruit. He knew what God had said, and knew that God had meant what he said. But he loved, too strongly, and to

his complete downfall, this woman God had given to him. And because he didn't want to deny her anything she wanted he gave in to her wishes and took the fruit along with her. In that moment Eve had become the competition. Adam made the decision to leave his own father (God) so that he could stay with Eve. I Timothy 2:13 & 14 says **“For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”**

## Complete unity

Maurice and I experienced a situation comparable to what happened to Adam and Eve and it completely devastated us. For 20 years we worked at Barratt Ministries with a brother who had become very precious to us. Progressing from being just a worker, he became a partner in our ministry, as we found him to be trustworthy and completely reliable. He lived an exemplary life, putting God first in every area, so much so that he pushed marriage and family life to one side and was prepared to accept whatever God desired of him be it marriage or celibacy. We encouraged him to write books, make music CD's and preach. He developed so much that he shared our load.

At the age of 46 God miraculously brought a woman with 2 teenage children all the way from Canada to be his wife. Maurice and I had met her on a ministry tour and God had shown us that this was the woman for our brother. She came with her family to spend a couple of weeks in our home, as this is also where we so have our ministry situated. She said she wanted to have a

retreat with us, but her real intention had been to get a husband. Her children also knew they were coming to England for a father, but never gave any hint of what was going on in their minds and hearts. They had been taught well to hold their tongues and keep a secret. On the last but one day of her retreat God opened our brother's eyes and showed him that this was the woman for him and he made his proposal without ever touching or kissing her. He asked her 2 simple questions: 1. Will you marry me? 2. Will you come and live here at the ministry with me for this is where God has called me? She answered "yes" to both questions and then left for Canada.

### Joy turned to pain

It was a joy to see our brother finally being given his heart's desire. Maurice and I were delighted that God had brought this woman from the other side of the world, it spoke so much of the wonderful way in which God can bring about his plans and purposes. Our brother, too, was walking in a daze. He didn't know what had hit him. But within a matter of weeks of his proposal changed. He became frightened, so much so that when I asked him why he was wasn't eating he said he could stomach food, he could identify with David when he said in the Psalms that the terrors had taken hold of him. Within a few short months our brother lost his joy completely, together with over 15 pounds in weight.

Why? What was happening? He shared with me that his fiancée was concerned about where they were going

to live, and how would he provide for them seeing as he lived by faith. She didn't want to rely on the ministry to support her, she expected her husband to do that as she and her children were now his responsibility. I could see the pressure our dear brother was under. He was faced with two choices, but which one would he choose?

## He pleased his wife

After just 5 weeks of marriage our brothers attitude towards us changed, so much so that he felt that he had been used and abused by us for the past 20 years. He left our house and ministry and went back into secular employment after living a life of faith with us for 10 years. His wife didn't like our lifestyle, she was ambitious and wanted more.

This incident cut Maurice and I deeply and we pined for our brother whose heart had been turned against us by his new wife. People asked what had happened as they couldn't understand his change of heart. Our brother had shared his testimony of the way we had all worked together in complete unity with them and they couldn't understand why he had gone.

## Sharing the burden

People who dealt with us at Barratt Ministries asked where our brother was, especially as he'd told them of his plans to install his new family in the basement of our premises where they were going to build for themselves a new apartment with their own front

door. I shared the events with our christian computer supplier who had become a good friend, saying that I never dreamt this could be possible, and was very surprised to hear what he had to say when he opened up to me.

Before he was married he had been called to the ministry. His intentions were to go to an American bible college and become a Pastor. He met and fell in love with a Christian lady who had done all her training for American hospitals and was fully equipped academically to go with him, and indeed had promised to join him in his vision. But as soon as they were married she said she wanted to stay in England and have a family. His focus had to shift if he was to keep her (or so he thought), and he ended up in computers and gave up his call to the ministry. Up until now he had been in the wilderness for 10 years and I had deep sympathy for this dear brother.

## One choice

Adam only had one choice if he was to keep his wife happy, he had to eat of the wrong tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus be cut off from God. We only have one choice if we are to keep God happy, we have to eat from the good tree of obedience and thus be cut off from the world. In this world there is diabolical competition, and be sure of this ... if we are to become disciples God will make sure we are put to the test to find what is really in our hearts.



## Challenge 59

### BURNING OR PRUNING?

Matthew 7:17-20

The first key word in this verse is 'every'. Every tree will be tested, no exceptions. Tested for what? To see if it has borne fruit. 'Fruit' is another key word. What is fruit? It is the character of Christ manifested in our lives. If the tree is 'corrupt' or bad, it is thrown out and burned

But what if you are a good tree, doing well and bearing fruit? You will be purged, cut back. Why? So that you will be even more productive. These two alternatives alone exist: pruning or burning. Either way, everyone's work is tested.

What is 'fire'? It is God's nature. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Fire is the means of God's ultimate judgement. We avoid the ultimate judgement of the lake of fire by becoming children of God. But we can also avoid the pain of 'suffering loss' in the purging, testing fire by building with the right materials; gold, silver and precious stones. God is love, he would rather not judge. But he will judge us for our benefit, so that we are not condemned with the world. He will cut off things in our lives that are not profitable for us.

# 18

## *God Does not Administer Anaesthetic*

It can be pretty daunting to find out that God loves us so much he is not prepared to leave us the way we are. You see he doesn't just put us in a bath of hot, soapy water to clean us up, then put fresh, clean clothes on us to make us look presentable ... like you would expect him to do if we had just been playing a game of rugby on a wet, muddy field. No! God goes much deeper than that. He performs surgery on us, because our problems do not stem from outside conditions and circumstances, our problems stem from the very heart and root of us.

I find also that God is not one to administer anaesthetic. Indeed, I have been very much awake and fully aware when he has applied the knife. Not because he is cruel and sadistic, but because he wants me to know what is happening so that I can remember

my pain for future reference and not have to undergo the same surgery twice.

I have been absolutely amazed at the number of people who can go through an operation and yet continue doing the very thing which caused their sickness in the first place, e.g. carrying on smoking after an operation for cancer. If, like these people, we carry on in our old ways after God has applied the knife, and still suffer the same sickness even though he has dealt with it once, God will just perform another operation and cut a bit more away from us (without pain relief) until, hopefully, we learn from our experiences. And boy, does God know how to operate!!

## Throwing out the gold

Some years ago I had a vision concerning one of Maurice's daughters to his first marriage. God had been calling her to leave secular employment and work full time for him. She truly loved God, but she was struggling trying to make this decision. In my vision I saw her in a motor boat but the boat wasn't moving. No matter what she did the boat just would not respond.

Eventually she went down into the hull where she had hidden an enormous bar of gold. It was tremendously heavy and was weighing the boat down so much that all movement was hindered. She knew she had to get rid of this gold somehow. It took a while but she struggled to get it on deck and then, with an almighty heave, she threw it overboard. Suddenly the boat lurched forward and almost flew across the water,

never to be seen again. Maurice and I didn't know what this vision was talking about, but apparently his daughter did.

Some time after this vision she had been sorting out things in her bedroom, putting important items all together in one handbag as they had been scattered in various places. Before retiring for the night she placed her bag and car keys on the chest of drawers nearest her door so that they would be easily accessible the next day when she went to work.

### A thief in the night

It is our custom to double lock the front door with a mortise key, especially when Maurice and I are away on ministry, but on this particular occasion she didn't bother. During the night a thief broke in through the front door. He made straight for her room and opened the door. She was fast asleep in her bed, but as the bag and keys were in full view as soon as her door was opened he didn't bother with anything else in the room and made off with them.

She awoke to the sound of her car being driven out of our grounds, and almost freaked out when she realised what had happened.

Fortunately, there were other people in the house she was able to rouse from sleep who rallied round to comfort her.

The funny thing was, though, that she suddenly felt a strange sense of relief at the incident. God had been calling her into full time ministry, but the car (the first

brand new car she had ever bought) was the very thing which was stopping her. She needed an income to keep the car on the road. If she had no income, she would have no car, and this was the hindrance. She had been unable to give up the car. But now that God had taken it away from her by way of this theft (and we believe that nothing can happen to us unless God gives specific permission for it), she felt tremendous relief because God had done in a moment what she had been unable to do for herself.

## No more ties

Sometime after this the insurance company paid out the money to cover the cost of her loss and she went straight to her dad and handed him the cheque to use for the ministry. Maurice was concerned and told her he didn't want her money, but she was adamant. She told him of her relief when God had taken the car because now she could obey Him. She certainly didn't want to buy another car and get herself tied up again. She was throwing the gold overboard.

Maurice and I were regularly ministering in Holland during this period of our lives and took her with us to baby-sit our first child whilst I was at the meetings. Being in Holland she was exposed to the work the people at this Mission Foundation were doing and stated she would like to join them. Maurice spoke to the brother who headed up the organisation and a place was immediately found for her. She literally got on a boat (the ferry from England to Holland) and

has never yet returned to live in England as God not only found her a job, but has blessed her with a lovely Christian husband and 4 healthy children. God doesn't make mistakes.

## Judgement time

When I was in my late 20's I attended a prayer meeting at my church which, at that particular time, was being taken by the Assistant Minister. After the initial usual prayers the meeting seemed to take on a different tone and people started praying and prophesying in a very serious manner. I sensed an awe in the building and had a vision myself which I didn't speak out publicly. I saw the word 'JUDGEMENT' in bold red letters in my mind, there was blood dripping from each letter as though they had been written in blood. It was very strong and I looked around the building in fear as people were weeping and confessing before God. The Assistant Minister was aware that something was going on and asked if people would like to come out for prayer. Nearly everyone in the meeting came forward, myself included, and he began to lay hands on their heads and pray softly for each individual in turn.

The Pastor of the church was in the meeting and at this point could sit in his seat no longer. He strode to the front of the church and, completely taken over by the Spirit of God, lunged at people with his hands outstretched shouting, "Receive the Power of God!", as he laid his hands on their head. I knew he was under the control of Almighty God and was terrified. As he

came towards me I trembled. “Receive the Power of God!”, he said and with a cry I fell backwards and lay on the floor. I was fully aware of what was going on, but completely unable to move. Then I began to sob, and sob, and sob. Half an hour later, still lying on the ground, the sobbing continued ... And it continued for the next 3 days and nights. I couldn’t go to work.

### A “deep work”

The sobbing stopped and over the following days I wondered what God had done in my life but couldn’t pin point anything, just thinking ‘he was doing a deep work in me’. But I have come to realise that these ‘deep works’ are more than mere comforting words.

Circumstances tragically changed for me in the church. Whereas I had been the church secretary, organist and a member of a music band, within a matter of weeks things had changed so dramatically that I was no longer doing any of these things. Indeed, I did not even attend the church at all, and went through the worst trial of my life which almost put a stop to me even calling myself a Christian. For the next 3 years I was a nomad in the Kingdom. No church, no ministry, and apparently no spiritual future. But it was during this period that I really found God. You never really know God until all the trappings have been taken away. Job went through the same process. Stripped of everything, except his breath (which he asked God to also take) and his wife (who couldn’t comfort him as she was grieving herself). It was then that God spoke

to him personally and gave Job a true revelation of himself.

My greatest trial, my greatest blessing

When God turned the tables for me after 3 years I knew I was different. I sobbed for 3 days and nights but went through my trial 3 years - a year for each day I sobbed. But now my sobbing has been turned to joy for I have found MY God. Not the God everyone preaches about. I know him for myself. My greatest trial turned out to be my greatest blessing for which I praise and thank the Lord. I have learned to put my limbs on the chopping block now because I derive great pleasure and satisfaction when I become aware of the changes God brings about in my character. Sometimes God even permits me to see and smell the fragrance of the beautiful fruit he is able to produce in a sinner like me and I feel very blessed.



## Challenge 59

### GOD'S WORK OR GOD'S WILL

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not every one that saith 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven ... I will profess unto them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'. This is a disturbing scripture. Were they ever truly converted? Are they Christians at all? Is it possible to use Jesus' name with genuine, miraculous results, and yet not know him? How can such 'wonderful works' be called 'works of iniquity'?"

There is a fundamental difference between 'the kingdom' and 'eternal life'. We enjoy eternal life because Jesus was slain to forgive our sins and make us children of God by grace. But whether we reign in the kingdom depends on how we have served Jesus as Lord. We may be children, but have we been obedient children? Jesus is not saying "Depart from me into eternal fire"; but these people will be excluded from the kingdom. They took for granted that they would share in his kingdom and his rewards, but they were terribly wrong. It is easy to use God's power. Everyone uses God's power to some extent. The worlds are upheld by his power, but not everyone has God's character. That is only available to those who will deny themselves and allow Jesus to have his way in their lives. Our emphasis should be on knowing Christ intimately. At the judgement seat of Christ gifts mean nothing, having the character of Christ means everything.

## 19

# *God's Talking To Me - Not You*

Many years ago, in the long gone days when I was single and had my own flat, there was an occasion when I wanted to use my premises for God and not be selfish with my own 'things'. I didn't have anything particularly to boast about in other people's opinions, but I had space and comfort in a nice quiet environment.

Looking around the church I attended I noticed that there were quite a number of old people who had lost their partners and lived either alone, or in worldly Old People's Homes. I decided to invite them all along to my flat after the Sunday morning service where they could spend the next few hours being waited upon by myself, enjoying Christian fellowship together and I would then take them to the evening meeting. I did this one Sunday each month for some time and was

quite amused to hear them chatter away about the past, their families, sometimes showing one another the scars from their operations (on one occasion I had to draw a line when they began to raise their clothes!) ... But very, very seldom about God, indeed Godly conversation usually only came about because I asked them to share how they had become Christians in the first place. They loved to talk about the past, I suppose they never for one moment realised they had a future.

No - one understood

My life took on a different turn and I had to drop this practice. Almost immediately people were up in arms because I had forsaken 'my ministry with the old people'! What! I had no notion that this was a ministry, it was just to my mind a nice thing to do for the old folks. But suddenly everyone in the church was putting me in a pigeon hole and my nice gesture had become 'a ministry'.

Maybe someone with a different character to mine would have continued this ministry for the sake of keeping the peace, but it showed me how easy it was for other people to run your life and not allow God to have a say.

Just a time filler

I knew that God had not called me to this work, indeed it was a time-filler for me whilst I was waiting for him to guide me. But we must always be at the beck and call of God, and have no other master in our

lives. To have continued in this vain would have meant I was doing God's work (as all good deeds are) but not God's will.

I went through similar experiences when helping out with children's work and prison work. People always thought they knew God's will for me and would put me into the little pigeon holes again by saying that I had a 'Children's Ministry' or 'Prison Ministry', and were miffed when I pulled out. But hey, God was talking to me, not them!

### According to their abilities

We are all very different. We have been made with individual personalities and have been trained in many varied ways through life, circumstances, education, disasters, etc.

When the talents were distributed to his servants in Matthew 25, the master gave them each according to their several abilities ... They all had different aptitudes, so they were given what he judged they could handle. He had well assessed their capabilities because he had trained them, so he knew what they could cope with. That was why he was so angry with the servant who had hidden his talent, the master knew this was sheer laziness because he had been trained and was well able to fulfil his assignment.

God has trained us throughout our whole lives to fulfil the purpose he specified for each one of us. When he gives us something to do he does not pity our flesh when we complain and say the task is too

hard, because he knows we have been trained and are well able to handle what is given. But we must stick to his plan, and his plan only. People - partners, children, pastors, bosses, and even animals, will do their utmost to manipulate and dictate to us. There is always someone who knows God's will for us better than we know for ourselves. But Jesus said that his sheep heard his voice and they would not listen to the voice of an hireling.

### Easier when moving

Sometimes you can be in a situation in life when you are searching for God's will. At these times I believe it is best not to sit back on your laurels and wait for Gabrielle to come and give you a personal visitation. Indeed that was why I invited the old people around to my flat, it was because I wanted to do something for God until he told me what he specifically wanted me to do. It is quite simple to steer a heavy sled whilst it is moving, the momentum of it's own weight often carries it without much effort. But try to move a sled from a standing position ... when the runners are frozen solid ... that is quite another story, and in some cases only a bomb will free it.

The ideal would be to do nothing unless we knew what we were doing was God's specific will for us as an individual. But, unlike Jesus, I don't think very many of us are in that perfect place. What I personally believe is that we should do the things God has required everyone to do, i.e. the Ten Commandments, the Sermon On

The Mount, all the instructions in the letters to the churches as to how we should treat our partners, families, brethren, neighbours, etc., and then when God can trust us to obey what he has told everyone, he will begin to trust us with the things only we were meant to do.

## Don't jump on the bandwaggon

The last thing God wants us to do is jump on the band wagon of other people. Maurice's father was an evangelist of international repute. God worked miraculously through him when he prayed for sick and demon possessed people. Astounding miracles took place so regularly that a producer from the BBC made an hour long documentary of his church and work way back in the 1960's and showed it in many countries of the world. Famous sports people of that era who had suffered injuries travelled from as far as India, and other distant lands, to the church to be prayed for after viewing the film. Spastics and people with incurable illnesses such as cancer, were instantly healed.

## We had a good teacher

Maurice and I were there with Pastor Barratt, supporting him in music and avidly watching every movement he made completely captivated by what God was doing through him. We had a good example and teacher to follow, God was giving us a good education. But God did not intend for us to jump on his band wagon.

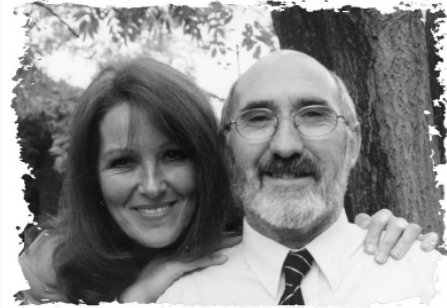
Many times when Maurice preaches or shares how he became a Christian, and gives testimony to the marvellous role model he had in his father, people will expect him to pray for the sick at the end of the meeting. But Maurice knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that his particular calling is different to that of his father. Maurice is not called to be a divine healing evangelist – not even an evangelist. He does not lose any sleep at night because he is crying for lost souls. He knows his calling. God has specifically and individually called him to be a teacher. And his pupils are not the unsaved, but people who call themselves Christians and are unaware of the cost of real Christianity and discipleship.

## Know your calling

Knowing God's will for us personally can give us tremendous freedom because we are confident we don't have to do what everyone else around us is doing. On the other hand it is also very awesome because sometimes God has got a job for us to do and there is nobody else around doing the same thing. It can be very lonely, unappreciated and unattractive, but only doing what we have been specifically called to do will count for anything when we stand before God and give an account for the deeds done in our flesh.



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