

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey backpack and dark pants, is walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk. The boardwalk is made of weathered wooden planks and curves through a lush green forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled shadows on the path. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

*Walking
the
Talk*

Narrow is the way that leads to life

Joanna Barratt

Walking
the
Talk

Walking the Talk

by Joanna Barratt

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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

ISBN: 978-1-7392723-1-9

First Published & Printed June 2023

by Barratt Ministries Publications

info@barrattministries.org.uk

www.barrattministries.org.uk

Walking
the
Talk

Joanna Barratt

Contents

Introduction	7
1 The Good Shepherd	13
2 Emotional Decisions	23
3 Pharisees	31
4 Enoch	41
5 Presumption	49
6 Over Familiarity	59
7 Grudges	69
8 Stop Mourning for What God has Rejected	79
9 Salt in Society	91
10 Divide and Conquer	103
11 David's Rejection	115
12 When the Need Becomes Personal – It's a Call	127
13 Wine Cheers the Heart of God & Man	141
14 Why Am I Different?	151
15 Doing the Right Thing With the Wrong Motive	161
16 Never Judge Someone Based on a Season	175

Introduction

My husband Maurice and I had been sitting on the plane for longer than usual and were tired. We had already had two flights, one from Manchester (UK) to Amsterdam, then from Amsterdam to Kigali, and were now waiting for passengers to board so we could continue our flight to Entebbe in Uganda. As we waited the pilot made an announcement that a lock-down had taken place in Entebbe which meant that they were no longer allowing planes to land in their airport. Negotiations were in progress between Amsterdam and Entebbe to see whether they would allow our plane to commence the journey or return to Amsterdam.

When we left England on our missions trip to Uganda there were already rumours going around that something was about to happen and people were unsettled. Because we don't buy newspapers, watch the news, or have a television to hear national

announcements we were unaware of the seriousness of the situation, although we had heard that it was impossible to buy toilet paper as the stores had been completely depleted due to people panic buying. It didn't really concern us, but now the situation hit us.

After some time the pilot announced over the speaker that since the ruling for the lock down had been made whilst we were in the air we would be allowed to continue our journey as we were only one hour away, but we would be the last flight allowed in. How amazing is that! We had booked our tickets months previously, before any rumours or unrest, yet God had chosen that we be on this flight!

We held a couple of scheduled conferences but when we turned up at the church where the third conference was to be held the pastor met us at the door and told us that he'd had to cancel as a lock down had been imposed on the nation, and churches, as well as many other facilities, had been ordered to close their doors until the lock down had been lifted. It was further ordered that no more than five people could meet together at any time. Wow, this really was serious! Maurice and I looked at one another, and then looked at the pastor. "Well, brother, we've come all this way from England and are still prepared to hold meetings and teach your people if you're prepared to join us."

Something came over the pastor and he suddenly became excited. “Okay,” he said, “We shall all take a chair from the church and you can follow me.” After hearing that instruction those who had turned up for the meeting went into the church, grabbed a chair (Maurice and myself included), and followed the pastor into the bush.

Our little procession walked in line for quite a distance until we reached a small village. There, under the shade of trees, in the midst of chickens, goats, children, and curious adults we held our meeting. This was so different to what they would have done in their churches. There was no hype with singing and dancing, no acknowledgements of dignitaries in the midst, no feedback from P.A. Systems which weren't being operated properly, and it was absolutely wonderful. Maurice taught and it was so free and easy that when he said something which was difficult to understand individuals asked what he meant and he was able to explain and expound further. The fellowship was real.

These people were taking a real risk. In England to disobey a command from the government we could expect a warning, or possibly a fine, but out here in Africa they ran the risk of being imprisoned or even shot. What we were in the middle of was the beginning of the underground church with

people who had made to the choice to obey God rather than the government.

Before lock down churchgoers criticised those who called themselves Christians but didn't attend church, telling them that the Bible instructs us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, giving the illustration of how a single coal which has fallen out of the fire cannot maintain its glow when away from the other hot pieces of coal. Yet when lock down came and the government ordered non-essential public meeting places which included pubs, restaurants, schools, businesses, and churches to close until further notice, the churches shut their doors without any struggle. Hospitals and Pharmacies remained open because these were classed as 'essential', but it only emphasised that the church is 'non-essential' and the members as well as the leaders saw it in that light too.

We have no excuse as there are so many examples of people in the Bible, whom we admire, who obeyed God rather than governments:

Moses's parents hid him rather than allow the soldiers of Pharaoh to kill him.

Pharaoh's daughter went against the decree of her father and took Moses in knowing he was a Hebrew baby and should have been killed.

Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego would not bow to the statue even though the king himself had

ordered it and ended up in the fiery furnace.

Daniel, with a high position in the government, ignored the ruling to not pray to any god for 30 days and openly continued his prayer life, ending up in the lion's den.

Peter and Paul were both instructed not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus but defied this ruling and ended up being imprisoned and beaten on numerous occasions.

Brother Andrew started his worldwide ministry by preaching and smuggling Bibles into countries where they were forbidden.

The list could go on and on ...

It's so easy to call yourself a Christian (I prefer to use the term Believer), but can you prove it by your lifestyle? Talk is cheap. It costs nothing to make statements, but can you live what you profess? Is God really the Lord of your life like you say he is? Can you prove it? Can you walk the talk?

Chapter One

The good shepherd

Who is Jesus? That's a question many people ask because sadly kids are growing up without that knowledge today as secular schools don't teach about him. Yes, they may include him in their national curriculum studies, but they educate about many gods and children are given multiple choices when it comes to faith. It was a long time ago when I went to school and since then we've had a couple of generations growing up without any knowledge of Yahweh, our Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth, or Jesus Christ his son. But I find that many Christians don't really understand who Jesus really is either.

The Pharisees and Scribes were forever asking who Jesus was too. Luke 15:1-2 says they murmured

(complained) and criticised Jesus's behaviour because he seemed to mingle with publicans and sinners on a regular basis. He even went so far as to eat with them – which was anathema to them. He claimed he was a man of God and did miracles, as well as healing the blind and raising the dead, so they knew he was special, but his lifestyle didn't add up if he was a 'holy' person.

Holy People?

There were 'holy' people in Jesus' day who would withdraw from the city of Jerusalem to go and live in caves by themselves. There are still people living like this way today called the Qumran Community. These people believed that in order to stay pure they had to cut off from all evil influences because they realised that Jerusalem was morally and spiritually compromised. They read and studied the scriptures all the time and kept themselves as pure as could be.

Obviously the Pharisees didn't go this far, but were very strict about whom they kept company with, and whom they extended hospitality to, because if you welcomed the wrong people into your house and entertained them it was like endorsing and approving their sin. And aren't we supposed to 'abstain from all appearance of evil'?

But Jesus was mixing with adulterers, tax collectors, and prostitutes, which in the eyes of the Pharisees meant he was tacitly approving what they were doing, and morally compromising himself. This is why they were murmuring, because if he was a man of God there was no way he would be doing these things.

The Good Shepherd

In answer to their criticism Jesus told a story implying that he himself was the main character – a good shepherd.

What man of you, having 100 sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness, and goes after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he's found it he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over 99 just persons, which need no repentance.

Luke 15:4-7

These Pharisees were just downright self-righteous and insensitive. In order to criticise Jesus

they were publicly running down and humiliating the people he associated with, who must have felt pretty inadequate to begin with. This story must have blessed the hearts of those poor people as much as it infuriated the Pharisees, who knew the scriptures backwards, especially Psalm 23 ... even Christians who don't read their bibles know that one.

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 says, '...the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing'. Why do I lack nothing? Because the Lord is a good shepherd.

'He makes me lie down in green pastures.' What's the big deal about that? Well, if you're a sheep that means you're surrounded by luscious food, so that's wonderful.

'He leads me beside still water' ... now this is important. The water has to be still otherwise the sheep can't drink. Why not? Well, a sheep is covered with wool. When wool gets wet it gets very heavy. So if you're a sheep and have to stick your head in the water to drink, and the waters are splashing all around you, the front part of you will get wet and very heavy. And because you're on an incline with your feet forward and your backside sticking up, you'll end up pivoting into the water. Now the rest of the wool gets wet and heavy. Sheep are not

good swimmers so eventually end up on their back bloated and dead. Still waters means safety.

'He anoints my head with oil.' Sheep can get their head caught in briars and die trying to get untangled. There are horrid little flies which like to torment sheep by laying eggs in their nostrils, these hatch and turn into worms driving the sheep to beat their head against a rock, sometimes to death. Their ears and eyes are also susceptible to tormenting insects. So the shepherd anoints their whole head with oil, then there is peace. That oil forms a barrier of protection against the evil that tries to destroy the sheep.

'He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.' When we're going in the wrong direction, the good shepherd turns us around to go the right way ... but it's for his name's sake! It's all about God.

It's good to remember what this Psalm is all about here. Verse 1 says, the LORD is my shepherd. We tend to think this Psalm is all about us, the sheep, for it says, I shall not want, he makes **me** to lie down, he leads **me** beside still waters, he restores **my** soul, but it's actually about the good shepherd and what **he** does for his sheep.

'Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.' I can understand the staff being a comfort because the shepherd uses that to grab hold of a sheep in a

compromising situation and pull it out of danger, but why did the rod comfort the sheep? Jesus and Paul were both beaten with rods!

Well if something was threatening the sheep the shepherd would use the rod to ward it off, it was used as a weapon to protect the sheep. So that would certainly comfort the sheep.

Counterfeit Shepherds

The Pharisees were 'self-appointed' shepherds and not called of God. The tribe of Levi was the God appointed priesthood, and they were meant to shepherd God's people, but we know that Paul the Apostle came from the tribe of Benjamin and had been a Pharisee. God has much to say about shepherds (another word is pastors) who have no heart for the flock.

This is what it says in Jeremiah.

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:1

In Ezekiel 34 God is truly angry with the shepherds because not only were they neglecting the sheep, they were actually fleecing and eating them, when they should be looking after them.

Many people have left the church because they've had bad experiences. Instead of going after the sheep, many pastors are driving the sheep away with their controlling spirit and heavy shepherding, whilst others are doing all they can to keep the sheep in the church because all they want from them is the wool off their backs (their tithes and offerings). And God warns these shepherds very strongly that there will be a day of reckoning when they will be punished.

This parable starts with Jesus asking the question – Which of **you**, having 100 sheep, if **he loses** one of them ... So, the fault is not with the sheep – it's with the shepherd. The shepherd has lost the sheep. He's a bad shepherd. He hasn't cared for the sheep. 'My sheep hear my voice'.

Hearing the Voice

Well, back to the sheep. From being very young the sheep would learn to recognise the shepherds voice. I have a friend who told me that during a vacation on a small farm the farmer's wife, who had about five sheep, would let them graze in a field

occupied by many sheep. Intrigued, my friend asked her how on earth she could tell which sheep were hers? She smiled and told him to watch. She went to the edge of the field and shouted over the fence, "Come here, girls!" And her five sheep immediately lifted their heads from the ground and ran to her. They knew her voice and that was how it was in Jesus' day.

Leaving the 99

Perhaps the shepherd with 100 sheep was letting his sheep graze in a field with other sheep, but when he shouted only 99 heard the call. It could be the other one was out of earshot and still had his head down. When a sheep eventually lifts its head and finds itself separated from the flock and alone, it wanders off trying to find the others and when it realises it's lost it will go and find a rock, a bush, or a big tree to hide behind, and will shake and cry. The poor sheep is literally paralysed with fear. It will quake and be unable to move even if you slowly walk up to it, and only at the point of touching it will it try to run. It will be totally vulnerable to any wild animal and will definitely not survive long in the wilderness. Even when the shepherd comes the sheep will not be able to respond to the voice. The shepherd has to pick the sheep up and carry it home.

It's the shepherd who makes the search, and looks for the sheep. He picks it up, and carries it. Yes, the shepherd has to pay the price for rescuing and bringing the sheep home. It's the shepherd who puts in all the effort – because he's a good shepherd. And when the shepherd brings the sheep home he tells everyone to come celebrate with him, and there's a big party.

What's the celebration all about? It's all about Jesus. Well, his friends are certainly not going to congratulate the sheep! The straying sheep was trouble! No, they shake the shepherd's hand and rejoice that he knew where to look and managed, once again, to find one of his own before it was ravaged by wild animals. Yes, that's what all the rejoicing is about, the fact that the shepherd has rescued another of his sheep.

This story is not about us ... it all about Jesus!

Here are some verses from John 17 – it's in the upper room at the end of Jesus' life, where he's praying to his father.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that

they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name: those that you gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil.

John 17:10-15

So you ask, "Who is Jesus?" Well, we've all been through times of testing in our lives which have diverted us from living the right way. Jesus said many things about himself that he was 'the way', 'the truth', 'the life', 'the door', 'the light', but in this chapter I am just showing how he is the good shepherd who looks out for and rescues us. Thank God we have a good shepherd.

If you're one of Jesus' sheep and have somehow missed your way, stop running, cry out, and let the good shepherd find you. He promised his flock that he would never leave them, nor forsake them. Just remember, Jesus is praying for us ... and he's lost none of the sheep who belong to him yet.

Chapter Two

Emotional decisions

I'd like to talk about the danger of making emotional decisions.

An emotional decision is always based on how we are feeling at the time. We can feel bored, frustrated, anxious, fearful, stressed, or angry, and if we're not careful these emotions have a way of being expressed through our words or physical actions. Our emotional state may be momentary, but the consequences of our decision made whilst we have these feelings can last a lifetime.

King David

We read of an incident in 2 Samuel 11 where King David made some emotional decisions.

King David should have been engaged in fighting the Lord's battles, but instead he remained in Jerusalem, and gave himself up to luxurious idleness, for the bible says he arose from his bed in the evening. He could have been feeling a little bored. He looked out of his window and saw a woman bathing. She was the wife of one of his valiant men, an honourable and well respected man in his army named Uriah the Hittite, who was at that very moment away fighting.

Now David already had 8 wives, but the fact that he was watching something he shouldn't have seen aroused his manly passions to such a high that he sent one of his servants to bring her to him, and his aroused passions could only be satisfied by committing adultery with the woman. His immediate lustful emotions had been satisfied, but as with all decisions acting upon them brought consequences.

No Turning Back

A few weeks after this encounter the woman let him know she was pregnant with his child. So, afraid of losing his good reputation, David called the husband home from the battlefield and tried his best to get him to spend some personal, quality time with his wife. But this honourable soldier in all conscience

couldn't do this knowing his comrades were at that very moment lying in trenches, risking their lives.

Realising his adultery was going to be found out, David sent Uriah back into battle with a dispatch for his commanding officer instructing that he be placed in the thickest part of the action. David wanted this man to die in battle. And he did!

My pastor used to say, "There's no such thing as a small decision because every decision you make affects the rest of your life." But the problem with humanity is that it's all too easy to make emotional decisions. This is something we need to watch out for. Our actions need to be ruled by our heads, not our emotions.

Starting a Fire

Fights start when provocative words have been spoken, because tempers flare up, and this ends up with fists flying. When I used to visit the prisons I found that many people were serving time for manslaughter. Manslaughter was not classed as murder because the deaths had not been premeditated. Someone had just lost their temper, reacted, and ended up killing the one they were angry with.

Girls get pregnant because of emotional decisions. Sometimes the girl didn't even know

the name of the guy. She'd just been at a party, got drunk, and the next thing she knew she was having sex with a complete stranger.

The vast majority of abortions are performed because of emotional decisions. The mother or father think a baby is too big a responsibility to handle so they get rid of their potential problem. Marriages often end in divorce because of pressure and frustration which force emotional decisions. People have walked out of jobs because they got upset about situations or procedures not going their way. Dogs have been kicked; crockery, computers, and furniture have been smashed; promises have been broken; lies have been told; and a million and one other things done, just because of making decisions when emotions were heightened. And with all these things we can either see there and then the consequences of our actions ... or we'll eventually reap them.

We Are Not Robots

What's the matter with us? Why do we act like this? Well, we are not robots – we are human beings, subject to passions and emotions. We all need a relationship with God because we are spirits which have been clothed with human bodies. Surgeons can't cut us open to find love, hate, passion or anger,

yet these emotions are fundamental and experienced by every single one of us.

David wasn't an evil man, he just had the same sinful nature as me and you, and made some very selfish emotional decisions. The first one based on lust caused him to commit adultery, and the second based on fear of being exposed caused him to commit murder.

King David covered his sin for such a long time that he even forgot he'd done anything wrong. He had married the dead soldier's widow, which made everything appear right as the child she was carrying was born in wedlock, albeit a little premature. But God sees all. Never make the mistake of thinking he doesn't. The bible says that one day we will all have to give an account for the things we have said and done during our life on earth.

Living in Denial

King David really loved God with all his heart and had a wonderful relationship with him. But although David was a really good and godly king, his sin had come between himself and God because he was living in denial. God gave David years to repent and set things right, but David had covered up for so long that he wasn't even aware he'd done anything to offend God. Eventually, after his stolen wife had given

him two more children (as recorded in 2 Samuel 5:14 and 1 Chronicles 3:5 and 14:4), God sent a prophet to remind him of his sin. As soon as David was made aware of the great pain he'd caused others, and what he had selfishly done, he begged God for forgiveness, and asked him to search his heart to see if there was anything else there that was wicked so he could be free of it. God forgave him, and it was only then that his relationship with God was restored.

We all Need Relationships

Almighty God ... and I'm talking about Jehovah, the God who created heaven and earth, and Adam and Eve the first two people to ever live ... created mankind with the need for a relationship with himself. If we don't have that relationship then nothing is properly in synch in our lives. And we can never have real inner peace because our sins separate us from God. God rewards obedience, but also punishes disobedience because he is the ultimate judge and is absolutely just. Every single person who has ever lived has sinned and been disobedient to God. We've all made stupid, messed up decisions which have separated us from God. The bible says that the wages of sin is death (that means spiritual death as well as physical death) but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus Christ (who is just a curse word to many people) was the only man who actually lived a perfect, obedient, life and offered himself as a sacrifice to God. He allowed himself to be sentenced to death, and killed so that he could pay the price for the sin of all mankind. God accepted his sacrifice, that's why the bible says that the free gift of God is eternal life **through** Jesus Christ our Lord.

For those who have a relationship with God yet still find themselves making emotional decisions like King David did, and find that somehow you've lost your connection with God, then the way back is confessing your sin and asking God for forgiveness, because the bible says that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It may never have entered your head that the missing something in your life is God, but if you ask Jesus Christ to forgive all the sinful and disobedient things you have ever done, and ask him to include you in the sacrifice he made when he died paying the price for sin, you too can be forgiven and begin to have a spiritual relationship with Almighty God.

But don't ever think you can fool God. If you've asked in sincerity and with deep regret that you've messed up, God will know, and you will definitely know if he has heard you. None of us can do this life on our own – it's too hard. We encounter too

much temptation and provocation every day. So the next time you feel yourself getting angry, frustrated, or upset, just take a deep breath and count to 20 in your mind, and ask yourself what would be the godly thing to say or do. Make decisions with your head, not with your emotions. Or another way of saying it is ...

Never open your mouth until you've put your brain in gear.

Chapter Three

Pharisees

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do (when reading the law of Moses); but do not copy their ways; for they say, and do not.

Matthew 23:2-3

Jesus told us to beware of becoming Pharisees. Why? Well, they were teaching the law of God and expected others to observe it exactly, but they didn't keep it themselves. They didn't walk the talk! Jesus called them hypocrites and was often verbally scathing towards them calling them 'whited sepulchres' and a 'brood of vipers'.

In Romans 2:6 we read that God will render to every man according to his deeds: because there is

no respect of persons with God. The more we know of what God wants from us, the more is required. If we know what God is requiring of us and we don't do it, then we have no excuse when we stand before him. We may not call ourselves Pharisees, but if we teach one thing and do another then we might as well be one of them!

Actions, not Words

You don't need to have a particular title, like pastor, or reverend, to be a teacher; parents and grandparents are teachers too. And, to be honest, parents have far more influence where forming our character is concerned than anyone else, because **actions speak louder than words.**

The bible is a great book as it doesn't hide the imperfections of the people God chose and used. God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to start a brand new nation who were to be the people of God. Yet if you look at the life of Jacob as he was growing up you would be appalled at his treachery.

Jacob was the younger twin when born but throughout his life always hankered for the birthright and blessing of the firstborn. His older brother Esau, had been out hunting one day and came home famished and faint, so Jacob seized the opportunity and actually got him to sell his birthright for a bowl

of stew. But that wasn't enough for Jacob, he wanted it all, and just waited for another opportunity to present itself.

In a Panic

Some years later Jacob's mother, Rebekah, overheard a conversation in which Izaac, her husband, told Esau to hunt venison, then make him a meal of it and after he had eaten he would give him the blessing, as he felt sure his time had come to die. Esau ran off to do his father's bidding, but Rebekah was in a panic. The birth of these children had been a miracle for she had been barren 20 years before God opened her womb. But during the pregnancy God told her that two nations were fighting for supremacy in her womb, and that the elder would end up serving the younger. Rebekah kept this in her heart but now she'd overheard this conversation and had to do something before it was too late, as once the blessing was given there would be no way to overturn it.

She called Jacob, who was her favoured son, to go to the flock and bring her two kids. She told him she'd make food for Isaac, just as he liked it, and Jacob could take it to him posing as Esau to get the blessing. Now Isaac was blind, but Jacob knew that even though he couldn't see he would know by

his voice he was not Esau, and pointed out that his brother was a very hairy man, and he himself smooth skinned. But Rebekah had it all under control and bound strips of animals skin upon his arms and the back of his neck so that he would feel hairy to the touch. She even gave Jacob Esau's clothes to wear so that he would smell like his brother. She did everything she possibly could to trick her husband into thinking Jacob was Esau.

Cursing Yourself!

Jacob was still not convinced that this deception would work and he'd end up being cursed rather than blessed. But Rebekah reassured him by saying that if her plan didn't work and Jacob cursed her son instead of blessing him, then the curse would be on herself and not him. It was only then that Jacob was prepared to go into his father.

What a wicked thing to do. Jacob deceived his blind father into giving him the family blessing and inheritance by pretending to be his brother, Esau. The name Jacob literally means 'supplanter', and the definition of a supplanter is something or someone who wrongfully takes the place of another. Wow ... was that name prophetic or what?

We criticise Jacob, but he was taught by his mother. It was Rebekah who cheated on her husband

to fulfil God's promise to her. She set a really bad example for her son Jacob by encouraging him to deceive his father. She was the parent and it was her duty to teach her children godly principles.

It's easy to criticise Rebekah, but this is where the warning of Jesus becomes relevant. Jesus told us to beware of becoming Pharisees. Why? They were in a position of authority teaching the law of God and expected others to observe it exactly, but they didn't keep it themselves. They didn't walk the talk and were in fact hypocrites! Paul says:

You who judge stealing, do you also steal?

Romans 2:21

No! You wouldn't do a thing like that. You're a Christian and wouldn't dream of doing such a thing. Well, I was of the same mind-set too and truly wanted to live a godly lifestyle, but well before I was married I remember shopping with a Christian friend. As we went around the aisles in the store we saw a packet of raisins which was broken open. My friend stooped down, picked up some of the raisins and popped them into her mouth grinning at me. I was quite shocked as to me this was stealing. But then she stooped down again, picked up some more raisins and put them into my hand motioning for me to eat.

I did. Then we both giggled to each other. But from that day onwards I used to walk down the aisles looking for broken packets to snack on during my shopping expeditions. Even when I had very young children I would find this habit really hard to break and would sneakily try to slip a sweet or piece of chocolate into my mouth without anybody seeing ... but they did see! Without realising what I was doing I was teaching my children to steal, and I was mortified to find that they were also doing it behind my back!

It's not only the shopping where you get exposed. What about your behaviour in the home? Do you and your husband argue and fight in front of the children? Do you say unkind things to one another when you get miffed? Do you roll your eyes when you're asked to do something you don't want to do, or when somebody says something which annoys you? Do you shout and bang things when you get frustrated? Do you call people idiots when you're driving, or use four letter words when you can't control your temper? What are you exposing of yourself to the people you live with? What are you really like at home?

Children are Little Mirrors

I know one thing for certain, children copy everything you do, especially when you do what you're not supposed to do, or say what you're not

supposed to say. They are little mirrors who reflect everything they see. They learn best by observing our behaviour, and will do **what we do** rather than **what we say**. During those months of lock down you were locked in with your families, there was no hiding from each other. I know for some people who don't know God this was perhaps the most traumatic time of their lives. The suicide rate went up, and domestic violence and child abuse increased dramatically. 2020 will be looked back on as a year of hell of earth for some people.

But what about you who are Believers and profess to have a walk with God and Jesus Christ? Were you enjoying your time together as a family, or as a couple? Or were you in that state where you felt trapped and just couldn't wait for your freedom again? Were you feeling the strain and waiting for everyone to go back to work or school so you could just have some peace? If you profess to be a Christian but had no peace in your home then you have become a Pharisee, a hypocrite, without realising it. What is your lifestyle really teaching? Because actions speak louder than words.

If you profess to be a Believer and say, "Greater is in he that is within me than he that is within the world"; or you pray for the sick believing you have authority to lay hands on the sick and for them to be healed; and yet were afraid to hug extended

family or friends for fear of catching or passing on something, then shame on you. Unless you can live the talk you're a Pharisee, a hypocrite.

As the Day Approaches

If you profess to be a Believer but refused to have face to face fellowship with other Believers because of a worldly guideline or statutory law, then you are disobedient to God. Paul said in Hebrews 10 that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but that we should be exhorting one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. Can't you see the day approaching? Can't you see that Jesus will be coming soon to judge the ungodly for their unrighteous behaviour?

So many church goers have formerly protested when people say they don't go to church, being adamant that we all need fellowship. They even give the illustration of how a single piece of coal that has fallen out of the fire, goes cold when isolated. Well shame on you, because at that very time when we all needed to be physically encouraging one another you were showing by your actions that church is a non-essential service – in other words it's not relevant.

In Tanzania the churches actually refused to be under lock down. When the pastors were told to lock

down like everyone else they refused and remained open because they believed they were essential to the well being of the country. The Tanzanian President not only allowed places of worship to remain open, but urged his people to go to their churches to seek refuge and healing. Which of our pastors or church leaders in the UK protested against the lock down?

Their actions spoke louder than words – the church is not relevant!

How many of us have read stories and applauded testimonies of those who smuggle bibles through to atheistic countries where it is forbidden to preach about God or hold meetings? We hear of people persecuted for their faith and even threatened with death, yet they still risk their lives to meet in secret. We call them the underground church, and support them with our finance and prayers because we believe what they are doing is right. What an inspiration these people are because they are bold and courageous. Daniel was in exactly the same situation as we were. A decree went out that nobody was to pray to any other god for 30 days, or else they'd be thrown to the lions. That was the whole of Babylon! The Babylonians served many gods so everyone was involved in this law, and Daniel actually worked for the government. He held a very high position. But he was a Believer and knew exactly where his allegiance lay, even though to disobey

meant the death penalty. He continued his lifestyle and after being thrown into the lion's den was not only delivered from being eaten, but brought great honour to his God because of his faith.

Faith is Provable

Nobody is forcing you to call yourself a Believer. So, be honest! You prove your faith by the way you live – it's provable. Make up your mind whether you're going to walk after the flesh or after the spirit. You were in lockdown whether you liked it or not but don't dishonour God by pretending to be what you're not. We are living epistles, known and read by everyone, so don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think soberly according to the faith you have. Don't profess to be more than you can live and make sure you don't show yourself to be a Pharisee to those who are watching.

Remember, actions speak louder than words.

Chapter Four

Enoch

We're told in Genesis 5:21 that Enoch was 65 years old when his son Methuselah was born: and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah 300 years, and had more sons and daughters. From this scripture you could almost get the impression that Enoch didn't walk with God before he had Methuselah. The birth of this child brought him into an even closer relationship with God.

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

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

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

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

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

Psalms 1:5

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

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

More Hypocrisy in the World

When I was growing up and trying the world out it wasn't long before I realised there was far more hypocrisy in the nightclubs than I ever saw in the churches. The drink, drugs and loud laughter covered up so many broken hearts and lives. Hurting souls have to escape reality somehow. And then there were the wolves, of both sexes, who were just on the prowl looking for their next conquest to spice up their lives. I encountered so many people who hid behind masks. I remember being on holiday in Portugal some years ago and talking with a young girl who was travelling alone. She really opened up to me and poured out her heart confessing how empty and lonely she was. She had no friends, no boyfriend, and yet on her Facebook page, she was another person entirely, always posting selfies of herself in exotic places, with exotic people, as though living a really exciting life. I could hardly take in the stark contrast.

In Genesis 6 we get a glimpse of what the spiritual climate of the world Enoch was living in was like.

The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

Genesis 6:2

Angels had actually left heaven to mate with earthly women! The result was that the earth was becoming a breeding ground for physical giants who were like mighty supermen. It was bad in those days, but what is it like in comparison today?

Sick and Evil World

We have embraced LGBTQIA2S, alternative lifestyles, abortion and pornography, and condoned drug abuse, violence, paedophilia, and sex trafficking. I don't know whether angels are mating with women today, but I do know we are creating super beings through artificial intelligence and who knows where that will lead? We are presently living in a very sick and evil world. There may have been ungodly hybrid giants in Enoch's day, but from the very first day he had the revelation of the coming judgement Enoch became a spiritual godly giant. This is what we read in the book of Jude

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord

comes with 10,000 of his saints, To execute judgement upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against God.

Jude 1:14-15

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

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

forgiveness, mercy, and peacemaking on a daily basis, then I wonder what sort of godliness you really do have.

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

Enoch had no Bible

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

Hebrews tells us that:

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

Hebrews 11:5-6

His testimony was ... **his walk, his lifestyle.**

So, what is our testimony? What sort of lifestyles as Believers do we have? What do people see in us?

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

The rewards for obedience are beyond our imagination. Before the world face the judgement of God, Jesus is coming back and has promised his disciples that where he is, we shall be also. Enoch, the prophet, was the first man to experience this promise for he was translated – one day he just disappeared without trace.

Enoch wasn't living in the Garden of Eden, but the bible says he walked with God. He started, and must have continued doing this for 300 years after Methuselah was born. His lifestyle was consistent. The story goes that he went out for a walk one day,

and God said, “Don’t go home today Enoch, you’re much nearer my home than yours, so come home with me.” And he was gone! Doesn't that sound beautiful?

He was translated ... carried over, or carried across. What does that mean? Well, God carried him across death. He did not see death. God picked him up, carried him over, and put him down on the other side. This hopefully is what’s going to happen to us.

The dead in Christ will rise first ... and we (if we're still alive and remaining on the earth) **shall be caught up to meet him in the air.**(carried over,or carried across death)

1 Thessalonians 4:16

What a thrilling thought!

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

Chapter Five

Presumption

One of the most dangerous characteristics to be found in humans is presumption. Doing something without permission or authority because you 'think' it's the right action to take.

In 1 Samuel 13 we read that King Saul had only reigned a short time over Israel when war broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites. The Israelites were greatly outnumbered and when they saw they were in real trouble they hid in caves, thickets, rocks, high places, and pits because they were afraid. The prophet Samuel had arranged for Saul to wait for him in Gilgal, and after seven days they would rendezvous. But when the seven days were up and Samuel had not yet arrived, and the people were scattering, Saul felt he needed to do something to rally his troops and boost their

confidence. He ordered that burnt offerings and peace offerings be brought to him, and he offered them to the Lord.

Know Your Place

Just as Saul had made an end of offering the burnt offerings, Samuel appeared and Saul went out to greet him. Samuel was stunned. “What have you done?” He said. It didn't really matter what excuse Saul gave, he should have known his place – he was not a priest, he was a king. Samuel told him, “You've done foolishly, and not kept the commandments of the Lord!” Saul had gone beyond his call of duty because he felt pressurised by the situation.

In chapter 15 we read that Samuel told Saul he was to utterly destroy Amalek – man, woman, child, ox, sheep, camel and ass – because of the way they had treated the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. Saul was zealous to prove that he could be a good king and acted immediately upon his instructions. First of all he warned the Kenites to get out from amongst the Amalekites, then went in with his armies to destroy them. He smote the Amalekites as commanded, but took Agar the Amalekite king as a prisoner, and spared the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. He only

destroyed what was vile and refuse. When Samuel arrived on the scene he was again stunned by Saul's refusal to obey God's instructions to the letter by allowing the very king – the head man – to live.

Oh yes, Saul always had excuses. When confronted with his misdemeanour he said he had spared the animals so that he could sacrifice to the Lord, but there was no explanation for the king! Saul was convinced that God would approve what he had done, and that he had obeyed God implicitly. But doing what he thought best was acting presumptuously.

God Repented!

Saul's presumption caused God to repent that he'd ever made Saul king. He'd turned back from following God, so God removed him and put David in his place.

There was an incident in 1 Chronicles 13 where King David was trying to bring back to Jerusalem the Ark of the Covenant which had been stolen. They carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. This was an exciting event. David and all Israel played before God with all their might, with singing, and with all kinds of instruments of music. But when they came to the threshing floor

of Chidon, the oxen stumbled so Uzza put forth his hand to steady the ark.

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he killed him on the spot, because he put his hand to the ark. And David was afraid of God that day.

1 Chronicles 13:10

Wow! That was severe! But Uzza acted presumptuously. He wasn't a Levite, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, just like King Saul, & God had specified that only the priests were allowed to bear his holy ark. His presumption, even in innocence, cost him his life. The dictionary definition of presumption is:

To assume or suggest to be true (without proof); to take for granted, to suppose; to conclude, with less than absolute supporting data; to believe.

Presumption is therefore not based on fact – it's supposition, and a really dangerous characteristic.

Some years ago God called Maurice and I, together with a small group of people, to intercession. We felt the burden for our city of Manchester as the moral climate had been declining for decades.

It's been nick-named 'Gaychester' for many years because of the Mardi Gras, the gay city, and ungodly lifestyle in general. So we began to pray earnestly for Manchester.

God's Perspective

After a few weeks of desperate prayer God showed me a vision. I was looking from a great distance away but I could see the vast city of Manchester nestling in a great valley, and crouching right over the top of it was an enormous devil, it was sitting there like a hen over her chicks. And God showed me this was the chief devil over the city. God then reminded me of the incident in the bible where the disciples couldn't cast one devil out of the epileptic boy, when Jesus said that this type doesn't go out but by prayer and fasting. Then God said "If the disciples couldn't cast this single devil out of the boy, what makes you think you can cast out the chief devil, who is over millions of devils, out of Manchester? You're presumptuous! There's disunity in the church you attend and you can't even get rid of the devils from there!"

We could see how ridiculous our prayers were so thought it best to pray for our church. But then God pulled us up soon after we'd started by telling us we were again being presumptuous because there

was disunity in our homes and we'd not yet cast the devil out from them. We could see the truth of what God was saying but even trying to cast the devils out of our homes was unreasonable because God showed us that we hadn't even got rid of the devil's strongholds in our own lives. God told us to get ourselves right first, become the people God will listen to, and then let God guide us to intercede for what's on his heart.

Nothing has Changed

We take too much on ourselves. We boast big things and think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. I have heard many preachers making public prayers on the internet binding the devil and taking control of the Covid virus, but it was all presumptuous talk. Nothing changed!

So many people are hurting because of the false prophecies given by well meaning Christians. Those giving prophecies may feel great to give words of encouragement to a wife who's husband or child is sick with cancer, telling them, "Thus saith the Lord, this sickness is not unto death!" They may feel really emotional and full of the spirit when they're saying it, but if the sick person dies then it proves the prophecy was not from God, in fact it was a lie. The prophet was presumptuous and has left behind a

confused, grieving wife or mother who now doesn't know what to believe.

False Prophets

My first baby was breech throughout the entire pregnancy. So many people prayed for me and I was given specific prophecies that the child would turn and be born naturally allowing me to have a pain free delivery. I held on in faith to these words and ignored the doctor's advice to book myself in for a Caesarean Delivery. I was in labour for about 11 hours but then found that my child was stuck in the birth canal as he was being born feet first. I was whisked off for an emergency operation to save both our lives. God was merciful to me, but that prophet was presumptuous and fed me lies.

If the words of prophecy are not coming from God, they must be coming from the devil – for he is the father of lies.

When Jesus took authority and commanded the sickness or devil to leave, everybody knew a miracle had taken place, because he only did what his father told him to do. He never acted presumptuously.

Some years ago we had foreign friends staying with us at our house. I did my best to make them feel welcome telling them to treat the house as their home whilst they were with us. I thought they

understood what I was saying, but I was speaking as an English person and they were African. I presumed wrongly of course. I was alarmed to find them using our land line phone to ring their family in Africa, and couldn't believe it when they'd eaten for their lunch a chicken I had left in the fridge for our evening meal. I had to say something to them. But when I did they looked amazed saying, "I thought you said we were to be at home! That's what we'd do if we were home!" I then had to explain that English people say things to be polite, but we don't actually mean them literally. I had presumed they would understand what I meant.

Surprised by a Bible

I was in my early 20's and remember a boyfriend giving me a birthday present. I could tell by the shape and weight that the wrapping paper contained a book, and couldn't hide the disappointment from showing on my face. I wasn't a reader and thought, "Oh no, not a book!" Surely he knew me a little better than that? I'd really have preferred something girly, and romantic. But when I opened the package I felt so embarrassed for I found the book was actually an Amplified Bible, and this was something I'd been planning to buy for ages. "You see," he said, "I do listen!"

We presume all the time. We pass on links and messages to people, who somehow get the wrong end of the stick and presume we are meaning something entirely different.

Something goes missing and we presume a particular person has taken it and end up wrongfully accusing them.

Somebody says something and we presume there is a hidden motive and they're trying to get at us in some way.

I know of many marriages which have failed because a spouse 'presumed' their partner would not object to something.

Why Do We Presume

I can think of a number of reasons why we act out of presumption.

1. It could be we're proud and think we know best in the circumstance – like with King Saul.

2. It could be that we're lazy, and can't be bothered finding out what we should do in the circumstance.

3. We may feel threatened or insecure because we know that if we ask for permission our request could possibly be met with disapproval, so we do

it anyway thinking we can explain later, and if we made the wrong decision we can always apologise.

4. Many times we're just bad listeners & instead of checking what the other person meant we just go ahead and do what we think anyway.

It's very easy to overstep the mark, all we need to do is think for someone else. We would do well to remember our station in life and not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. I fear pride is really at the root of presumption, and the Bible says that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Chapter Six

Over Familiarity

The bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – in other words it's the very foundation, the building block on which our understanding of God stands and rests. If we lose our fear of God then the whole building which we have erected will fall down, because over familiarity is very dangerous. Yes God has saved us and accepted us into his family as adopted sons and daughters but if we forget who God is, and who we are, we will feel entitled rather than grateful – and I fear this is the sin of our modern society, we have lost the fear of God, and it breeds contempt.

A good example to take note of is Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaid. It seems she was very happy in her employment and enjoyed a good

relationship with her mistress. Sarah had been barren throughout the whole of her marriage but now God had spoken to her husband Abraham telling him his seed would be as the stars in the sky for multitude, but he had no children and Sarah was now 75 years old! Because she had such a secure relationship with her handmaid she felt safe when asking Hagar to be a surrogate mother. But after Hagar had been intimate with Abraham, and found herself pregnant, her attitude towards Sarah changed.

Feeling Superior

Hagar was able to do something her mistress was incapable of and suddenly she felt superior. She was going to be the mother of Abraham's child and now only felt contempt for her mistress – she had become over familiar in this family circle. But even though she held this trump card, a few years later when God had miraculously opened Sarah's womb and she'd borne Abraham the son God had promised him, Hagar, together with the son she had borne for Abram, were thrown out and no longer welcome in the family. They were cut off.

In the bible women are very significant. They represent the good woman or the bad woman; the church or the counterfeit religion; the Bride of Christ or the Whore of Babylon.

It's so easy to start off right and end up wrong, as in the case of Hagar, & we've all done it. We only have to look at the way our children usually develop to see that this is just part of human nature. As parents they depend on us entirely from the moment they are born. We teach them everything because they know nothing. How to eat, walk, talk, wash, dress, and we teach them our culture – what is acceptable or unacceptable in our society. Children look to their parents as the source of all knowledge. But then they go to school and an ungodly teacher takes over. And it doesn't matter what you have taught them about God, the education system will do its utmost to indoctrinate your child with worldly values, and convince them there is either no God, or there are many gods to choose from; and encourage them to experiment with sex, alternative worldly lifestyles, and to be free thinkers.

Educated by Your Children

It's not long before your child is now trying to educate and correct you saying your thinking is wrong, you're old fashioned and you've neither moved with the times, nor accepted progressive ways of thinking.

They become contemptuous of your lack of education because they are over familiar, they know

your arguments before you've even spoken them, and don't value your opinions any more.

Don't Demand from God

When we first become children of God we are in awe of him and his great goodness, but if we're not careful we listen to carnal Christians who educate and indoctrinate us to start expecting and making demands of God. "If God has said it in his word then you have to claim it brother/sister". "You have to lock yourself in a room and tell God you won't come out until he's answered you". Many even go so far as to sing and say, "I am a friend of God!"

In Psalms 103:7 God made known his ways unto Moses, but he made known his acts unto the children of Israel. When God tried to speak to the children of Israel on the mount when giving the ten commandments, but they were so terrified that they begged Moses to make him stop speaking. They couldn't bear the sound of his voice. This is what it says in Exodus 20:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, You speak with us, and

we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that you sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

Exodus 20:18-21

The children of Israel saw God's almighty acts in Egypt, they even crossed over the Red Sea on dry land and witnessed God drowning the entire Egyptian army, but they never became friends of God. They couldn't even stand the sound of his voice.

Moses was so different. The Israelites pulled away when God spoke, but he went nearer to where God was. He was in awe of this God, absolutely besotted. He never ran away from him but always drew closer. God is a consuming fire – the whole mountain was on fire and smoking like crazy, the noise of trumpets was deafening and there were great thundering and lightening ... but Moses went up into the middle of it all and stayed with God, without any thought of food or drink, for 40 days. He did this twice, and when he returned after the second time the skin on his face shone and he didn't even know it. He had to wear a veil over his face whilst speaking to people as they were scared stiff of

his appearance. But the veil always came off when he communicated with his precious, wonderful God, because he loved him with his whole heart & delighted in his laws. He was in such a relationship with God that he knew his ways, he knew what pleased him, and he delighted in pleasing him. And the Bible records that the LORD spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks unto his friend.

God Defends his Friends

You want to sing 'I am a friend of God'? Well if you want to find out whether you are God's friend or not here is a little pointer. God defends his friends. Here's what happened when people just spoke ill advisedly to Moses ...

And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he'd married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has he not spoken also by us?

Numbers 12:1-2

... And they were right. They had both prophesied. God had spoken through Aaron to Pharaoh when Moses had returned to Egypt to deliver

the Israelites, and Miriam had led the women with timbrels and dances when they'd crossed the Red Sea.

... AND THE LORD HEARD IT. (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) And the LORD spoke suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out you three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.

Numbers 12:1-2

Did you notice that verse – (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)? The words are even put inside brackets as though there's a very unique thing going on here. Moses never forgot who he was or where he'd come from, and because of this never became over familiar with God. He always knew his place. The one and only time he overstepped the mark God dealt with him harshly and rescinded his promise of him entering the promised land, because he didn't follow God's instructions exactly. Even Moses could not trifle with God.

Fear God

More important than not forgetting who we are or where we have come from, is to remember whom we are speaking to. We must never, ever forget who God is. The Bible tells us in Matthew 10:28 to not fear them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear **him** which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Remember, Jesus said many will say to me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in your name have cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works?” But they'll get a terrible slap in the face when Jesus turns round to say, “I never knew you! Depart from

me you who work iniquity!” God will not accept con-men into his kingdom.

Christian Imposters

You've all probably seen or heard of that film, 'Catch Me If You Can' where a young man makes millions of dollars posing as an air-pilot, a surgeon, a barrister, and yet he was never actually employed by any of the firms he worked in. He was just acting, and being paid for the 'con' work he was doing. Many people pose as Believers, they preach, prophecy, and have even healed the sick and cast out devils, but they've not been put to work by Jesus Christ. They may have been put in position by the church elders or leaders but they are imposters because they have never come under the authority of Christ as disciples and learned how to love, to be humble, how to mourn, how to be meek, they do not hunger or thirst for righteousness, they have no mercy, they are not pure in heart, or peacemakers. If you find it too hard to love, and your heart is full of bitterness, or you have resentment and unforgiveness towards anyone, then Jesus said your heavenly father will not forgive you. So if you stand before God and are not forgiven where does that leave you?

Take a good look at your life, search your heart. If you're not obeying God's instructions about how

you should live then don't make outrageous claims which are not true, or think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. It will breed contempt in you and you will become contemptuous to other people because they will read you like a book; and you cannot hide hypocrisy.

David loved and delighted in the law of God, and wrote about it constantly because it brought great peace and gave him the ability to forgive his enemies. Even though he was a king he never overstepped his boundary and always had great love, respect, and a very healthy fear of his God. May we endeavour to make sure we are never over familiar with Almighty God, but learn to observe and love his commandments and laws at all times.

Chapter Seven

Grudges

Have you ever wondered how somebody you always thought loved you can turn to become savage and vindictive? King Solomon said;

Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23

Anyone who holds a grudge and allows it to fester in their heart can turn and become vindictive.

I recently spoke about a situation which occurred in King David's family where his son, Amnon, forcefully raped his half sister, Tamar, which resulted in Absalom, another son of David, murdering his brother Amnon two years later to

avenge Tamar, as she was his full sister from his own mother. Absalom then ran away to live with his grandfather whilst the dust settled.

David knew and understood why Absalom had killed his brother and the Bible records that the soul of king David longed to go after Absalom ... but he never did, there was silence.

Difficult Relationships

After three years Joab, the captain of David's army, could see how David longed for his son and thought of a way to mend the breach between them. David consented to Joab's request and Absalom was brought home to return to his own house. But David wouldn't meet with him personally. He was two full years in Jerusalem, and still didn't see his father's face.

Absalom couldn't understand why David didn't want contact with him and his frustration was building up to boiling point. Why did he bring him back from living with his grandfather? He'd been happy there but was miserable in this present situation. Out of sheer desperation he decided to send a very effective message to Joab, by setting his barley field on fire – it seems this was the only way he could get his attention. Of course Joab came demanding to know what possessed him to do

such a thing. Absalom said "Why am I come from Geshur? It had been good for me to have been there still: let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me". So Joab told David: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

At last the silence was broken and there was some communication between David and Absalom but the problem was that David had provoked Absalom to wrath by his injustice concerning Amnon and the seven years of silence between them. Absalom had been both discouraged and offended by David's behaviour and I can understand that. He must have been deeply hurt.

Losing Respect

But it had festered in his heart and he now harboured a grudge.

The man Absalom had once loved was now the man he hated. In the same way Amnon's love turned to hate with Tamar, so Absalom's heart had now turned. He'd lost respect and wanted payback, and there is never a good reason for wanting payback

Jesus said it's impossible to not be offended in this life but woe to those who have caused the offence. David offended Absalom in ignorance, but Absalom

knew exactly what he was doing when he conspired to dethrone David. In 2 Samuel 15, we read that Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgement, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city are you? And he said, Your servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, your matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear you. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which had any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came near to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgement: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:1-6

Proverbs 18:24 says that if you want friends you must show yourself to be friendly: and this is exactly how Absalom won the people.

Absalom was 40 years old, it could even have been his birthday, and he asked David if he could go to Hebron to pay a vow he owed to God as he'd made the promise that if God brought him back to Jerusalem then he would serve the Lord. It must have been like sweet music in the ears of David for one of his sons to say he wanted to serve the Lord. He sent him to Hebron in peace and with his blessing.

King Absalom

But Absalom had already sent spies ahead of him as he journeyed there with 200 hand picked soldiers from Jerusalem who knew nothing of his intentions. The spies were to let the tribes know that when the trumpet blew Absalom was going to be crowned king in Hebron.

And Absalom sent for Ahithophel, his father's own counsellor, who came and joined forces with him. The conspiracy against David was strong because the people continually increased who were for Absalom.

When David got wind of what was afoot he made everyone under his protection evacuate Jerusalem, just leaving behind ten concubines to keep the house. This mighty king David was a broken man. He knew what Absalom was capable of if there was a battle : like father – like son, and once

he found out that Ahithophel was conspiring with Absalom he prayed the counsel of this wise man would be turned to foolishness.

And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

2 Samuel 16:23

What an unexpected blessing for David when his friend Hushai came to meet him. Hushai was truly distressed about what was happening and would have joined David on his journey but David said he'd be of more use to him if he offered his services to Absalom so that he could defeat any advice Ahithophel might give.

Bad Advice

Unfortunately, Absalom had already taken Ahithophel's advice to go into his father's concubines in the sight of everyone, assuring him David would abhor him, and Absalom's men would be strengthened.

But the next time Ahithophel gave a plan of action, which would actually have destroyed David and completely wiped out his supporters, it was overruled because Hushai had seemingly come

up with a better suggestion. But actually God was intervening here.

And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

2 Samuel 17:14

Absalom led Israel out to war against David's men but there was a mighty slaughter of his conspirators. Absalom was trapped so rode his mule through the woods, and as the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, his head caught hold of the oak, and he was left hanging in the air by his thick hair. It didn't take Joab long to put an end to his life. Absalom received the treatment he'd intended for his father.

But how wicked when a son can plot to kill his own father! How did things get so bad between them? Well Absalom took offence because David didn't deal with his half brother Amnon after he'd forcefully raped his sister. He couldn't get rid of his anger so it festered and grew inside of him. And after seven years with no communication with David the offence had turned into hatred and all

be wanted now was revenge. But what happened to Ahithophel?

And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and went him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

2 Samuel 17:23

I can understand somewhat this situation between David and Absalom, but why did Ahithophel become so vindictive? He had been David's counsellor and his words were regarded as the oracles of God, as though they'd come from the very mouth of God! Why did Ahithophel turn to become David's enemy? Well there are two verses which shed a great deal of light on this.

And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

2 Samuel 11:3

Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite.

2 Samuel 23:34

Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather! David had committed adultery with his granddaughter and murdered her husband to cover his tracks many years previously, and he'd never forgotten. This once very godly man had also borne a grudge which had festered in his heart and it turned to such hatred that he wanted to kill David in revenge.

The Roots of Murder

Grudges are way too serious to hold on to, they eat you up. The bible says don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Get rid of your offences, your grudges, before you do or say something stupid because they can destroy even the most godly among us. In any criminal investigation you will find that detectives always look for motives, those things which have been festering in the heart. Even they know that holding onto grudges and unforgiveness are root causes for murder, and they will dig and dig until they find those motives. I'd just like to bring a few verses of scripture to you. We all need to know what we're dealing with when it comes to matters of our heart

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

Jeremiah 17:9

Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

Matthew 15:18-19

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.

Mark 7:21

Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

Hebrews 12:15

And finally ...

Keep your heart (protect your heart) with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23

Chapter Eight

Stop mourning for what God has rejected

I think one of the hardest things for Believers to cope with is when God says, '**No**', in answer to our prayers. And this happens even to the best of us. Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane praying the most heartfelt and fervent prayer of his life when he requested God, his Heavenly Father, to let this cup of suffering pass from him, but God said No! His will was that Jesus went through suffering and the cross just as God had ordained. Jesus had to come to terms with it and submitted willingly, and he did so by saying, "Not my will but your will be done."

We all have to come to this conclusion willingly if we are going to please God. You see that's what

faith is all about – believing, not just in our heads, not even with our words, but deep down in our hearts, and working it through in our actions, that God's way is the very best way for our lives. Jesus said;

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

John 15:1

God is the Gardener

We've got to come to terms with God being the gardener. And the very best gardener there is. He removes what is of no value, that which is taking nourishment from the branch but is in actual fact just sapping the life and will never bear fruit. We should be grateful rather than hurt when God cuts these things away, but unfortunately we just don't quite get it. You see, we don't think like God thinks. We always have the idea that it's really hard following God because he demands so much from us, we haven't quite got the principle that he's a master gardener who knows the perfect procedure for each unique individual to produce the fruit God is looking and hoping for. We keep on forgetting

that it's not about us – it's all about God. In 1 Samuel 15, we read that God told Samuel:

It repents me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

... And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.

1 Samuel 15:11 and 35

Saul had not borne the fruit God had hoped for. He'd set a rebellious example to the children of Israel by not following God's instructions precisely. He'd kept acting in presumption and going against God's commandments. This was obviously not what God was looking for in a king. God wanted the king to lead his people in **his ways**, to rid them of his enemies, to love the law of the Lord, but Saul wasn't fitting the job description and Samuel couldn't see the whole picture.

The LORD said unto Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?

1 Samuel 16:1

God was telling Samuel to stop mourning for what he'd rejected! Saul just didn't fit the bill! God now had someone else in his sights who would replace Saul and end up fulfilling all his will. That man was David, and we all know he was the perfect man for the job. If God says a person is not right, or a situation is not right, or a job is not right, or a house is not right, or a relationship is not right (and the list could go on and on) then stop mourning for what God has rejected. Start believing that God has something else in mind. Paul says this:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 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

In the New Testament those who were not Israelites by birth were given just four simple commandments to observe concerning how they were to present their bodies as a living, holy sacrifice to God.

Paul said ... Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the

Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

Acts 15:19-20

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

and 28-29

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

Acts 21:25

This is all to do with presenting the body, but how do you have your mind transformed? Well it has to be renewed.

Did you know that all our physical organs constantly renew themselves? Lungs take a real battering when you smoke so let's take lungs as an example.

When you stop smoking how long do you have to wait before the health benefits actually take effect? It has been established that...

20 minutes: Your pulse rate will return to normal.

8 hours: Your oxygen levels begin to return to normal, whilst nicotine and carbon monoxide levels in your blood decrease by over 50%.

48 hours: You should start to notice an improved sense of taste and smell.

72 hours: Your lungs begin to relax and breathing should be easier. Nicotine is completely eliminated from the body and as a result nicotine withdrawal symptoms will have reached their peak.

5 to 10 days: The average smoker will begin to notice a reduction in the number of nicotine cravings experienced in a day

2 to 12 weeks: Your circulation starts to improve. You may notice that physical activity becomes a lot easier. You'll be free of the addiction and any psychological effects of withdrawal should have ended.

3 to 9 months: Lung function begins to improve markedly. Coughing and wheezing becomes less frequent and the risk of respiratory infections begins to decrease.

1 year: Your risk of heart disease decreases by around 50%.

5 years: Your risk of stroke is significantly reduced, as your blood vessels begin to widen again, making blood clots less likely.

To renew your mind all you need to do is start reading the Bible and look at the way Jesus and the disciples lived.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Philippians 2:5

He that says he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

1 John 2:6

Once you start **doing** what the Bible says rather than just reading it, the transformation should be evident very quickly.

If you've presented your body to God in the way that is acceptable to him by being holy – that means keeping yourself uncontaminated by the world, and your mind has been renewed so that everything you now think has been passed through the Jesus filter, all that follows in your life will prove to you that God's will is good, and acceptable, and absolutely perfect. God will prune and cut away from your life what is unprofitable according to his perfect will for you. All you need

to remember is that he cuts off to replace it with better.

God takes people out of our lives as he did with Samuel and Saul.

God Speaks Clearly

It so happens that I was engaged to be married to another man when God told me in no uncertain way that I was actually meant to marry Maurice. Because God spoke to me very clearly I was able to call off the engagement even though I was madly in love with the guy. I know it broke his heart as I gave him no good explanation. He hadn't done anything wrong. But God showed me clearly that this marriage was impossible and God would never be able to fulfil his plan for me if I went through with it, and the only life partner for me was Maurice. The break up was quite easy for me initially as I'd heard God speak, but the weeks and months following I too felt the same awful pain he did and I mourned the pruning. I don't think I'd have been serving God now if I'd followed through with my plan. Obviously I can see the tremendous goodness of God's plan now. Maurice was certainly the only man I could have married and we have served God together in complete unity for over 55 years.

Count Your Mother as Dead

I have shared in my writings that I had a traumatic relationship with my mother. I prayed, and often fasted, for God to heal our relationship for many years but never seemed to make any headway. One day as I was speaking to God about the situation he spoke to me, saying he couldn't heal someone who doesn't want to be healed. We all have free will. If we come to God of our own volition then God will respond, but he will never take our free will away from us. Mum didn't want reconciliation. She wanted to nurse her grievances, whatever they were, and didn't want a relationship with me.

God said, "No, Joanna, I can't heal somebody who doesn't want to be healed... but I can raise the dead! Treat your mother as though she were dead and I will raise her to life!"

What an incredible thing for God to even suggest to me! He was telling me to completely cut my mother off, act as though she was dead, have no communication with her whatsoever, no visits, no phone calls, no birthday cards, no Christmas cards, no prayers, nothing. Wow! I never actually realised how much physical effort I was putting in until I stopped. At first it was really hard, my conscience told me I was being disrespectful, dishonouring,

ungodly, uncaring. People would ask me how my parents were doing and I would say I didn't know as I'd not seen them, and because they knew the situation they'd criticise and rebuke me. But I'd heard God and stuck with it.

Raised From the Dead

The cutting off had been really hard, and I'd mourned at first. But when God grafted my mother back into my life, after me treating her as dead for seven years, it was as though we'd never ever had a problem in the first place. We were not only reconciled but she eventually told me that I had turned out to be the best of her four daughters, as I was there with her right at the end of her life. And the joy of being reconciled to my father was well worth the wait. Oh, how I ended up loving and being loved by that dear man whom I'd once wanted to kill. We certainly prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that God's will doesn't only please him, but is the very best way for us to live, bringing such joy and fulfilment.

I Was Devastated

I was 41 years old when I was pregnant for the second time. It was actually on my little boys second

birthday that I began to bleed. I knew this wasn't a good sign so I rang the hospital and they told me to go in for a check up, warning me that I would probably need to stay in for a few days to rest. To be honest I was actually looking forward to that.

When I got to the hospital they took me for a scan and, after different people looked at the screen, was eventually told me that the baby I was carrying had already been dead for four weeks inside me and needed removing. I was devastated! I'd been serving God since I was 15 years old and couldn't believe this news. I knew God could do anything.

I begged God to change his mind & let the child live, but eventually had to come to terms with God's decision and have the child removed. My lips uttered the same words Job said, "God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord", but inwardly I was not happy with God's decision. I continually prayed for another child. Whenever I saw a pregnant woman, or someone pushing a child in a pram, or even glimpsed a baby in a magazine I would burst into tears as the pain of my loss surged through me. Grief and mourning can be inconsolable. But one day whilst I was speaking to God and begging him to give me another child before it was too late, he very clearly spoke back and told me to stop putting him under pressure. He actually told me I was taking away his free will by mourning his decision and continually asking him to give me another baby.

I'd never seen it like that before, this was a revelation to me. So I immediately repented, and to show my sincerity gave away all the baby equipment I'd been saving: the cot, the pram, toys, and baby clothes, I gave them all to a pregnant friend 100 miles away.

Of course it hurt, but unless you can say from your heart, "God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord", and really mean it, you are still mourning for what God has rejected. And if you're not careful you can end up trying to run God's life rather than allowing him to run yours.

James 4:7 says submit yourselves therefore to God. When you and God are in agreement over anything there is no need to submit, you only submit when you don't agree.

God has a free will, it's not our place to try to take it from him.

Don't mourn for what God has rejected. Learn to trust God and be at peace.

Chapter Nine

Salt in Society

From my earliest recollections I can remember my mother pointing out to me that if I wanted to be on the television and get on in the world of show business I would either have to expose my body or sleep with the directors. This sounds like a 'sweeping statement', but the more I consider it, the more I realise she was absolutely right. As I was very plump as a young girl, and had a fear of being taken advantage of, I decided it would be better to explore other ways of earning a living. But, if you have any degree of talent, or a bit of exhibitionism, the stage holds a tremendous attraction. I was used to performing vocal and instrumental solos before audiences in school concerts, and the applause even to my young ears, was heady. I felt good at

something, of value, accepted, and this gave me a glowing sense of self-worth.

Singing in the Bath

Not being content to just sing whilst in the bath, it was a natural progression for me to move from school circles to church circles. I had a West Indian friend who also had a good voice so we rehearsed hymns together, singing in two-part harmony. When I was a kid churches were not as sophisticated as they are today, and pastors did all they could to encourage their young members to find a niche. My pastor often asked my friend and I to sing during our regular services, and after hearing us, pastors from other churches would also invite us to sing for their congregations. Sometimes we would even be booked to sing at conventions and now we really felt we'd hit the 'big time' because we were given a ministry gift afterwards.

Our style was very primitive. We would ask the pianist, (whether they could play well or not), to accompany us whilst we sang. After just one brief 'run through' before the meeting, we'd perform without microphones to an accommodating audience who beamed smiles at us. They all wanted to encourage us. And they did. But when I reached 16 years of age I was asked to join a group. This was totally

different. Each member played various instruments, and each song was treated in a completely different way. We practised our material for weeks before performing anything publicly. We'd work on introductions, endings, vocal backing, and only when it was as good as we could get it would we bring it to the church. We became very proficient and were regularly booked by other ministers for services and conventions. After returning from our tour in Holland where we performed in some of the Dutch churches, we felt it was now time to expose ourselves and begin playing in 'the world'.

Salt in Society?

This was of course the ultimate. We would be 'Salt in Society', getting work in pubs and clubs singing a few worldly songs and mixing in some Christian songs, this way we could get to witness in a way that would be acceptable. How else were we to affect the world? If people wouldn't come into the churches to hear us, then we would take our music out to them. We talked about our plan over and over together but couldn't feel right about it. We booked ourselves into recording studios and made albums, we began to get bookings for concerts, all the time waiting for the right person to come along to spot our talent and put us in the big league. We

did everything we could to be professional in our performance, from the clothes we wore to the way we held our microphones. We advertised ourselves, but still God kept us hidden.

Not a Good Witness

I do remember one occasion when we were asked to provide the music at the 21st birthday party of a friend of ours who was a professional model. She asked if I would do a duet with her. She asked if she could buy me a dress identical to the one she would be wearing so that we would look really good singing together. But after seeing what she had in mind, and realising I was going to try to be a 'witness' at this worldly do, I declined her offer. We sang all the right songs as far as Christianity was concerned, then the band had a giggle accompanying our friend and myself with the song of her choice, 'Big Spender', and it was only after this song that I realised what we were doing... We'd become mere entertainers. We lapped up the applause of course, and the men tried to flirt with me. The guys in the group ate the food, and drank the alcohol, and except for the fact that we went to church, we were no different from any of these other worldly people gathered there.

On another occasion I was asked to do some session singing in a recording studio with an internationally famous hairdresser. He was putting on an elaborate fashion show in London and to make it even more unique he wanted to incorporate a love song. In his very sexy Swiss accent he sang the male part whilst I sang the female part. He sang his vocal very convincingly whilst I tried my professional best to get into the song, but knowing that he was a self-professing homosexual made me feel unbelievably uncomfortable. I blushed. He could see the discomfort I was in and revelled in it, becoming even more teasing with his manner and sang whilst looking right into my eyes. I think that was one of the worst jobs I ever took on, and made everything to do with show business and fame filthy, corrupt, and false to me.

What Price Promotion?

Many years ago I happened to see a television interview of Sheena Easton. The programme was very educational because it traced how she'd actually become famous. She'd started out as a pub and then club singer, before being noticed by a talent spotter who offered her a record contract, but in order to be promoted she had to succumb to quite a number of changes, both physically and musically.

She'd started out as just an ordinary, good looking girl, but they cut and restyled her hair, gave her a complete makeover, and changed her style of dress. She looked a completely different person. Then they chose the songs for her to sing. The effect was quite astonishing, she didn't look or sound anything like the same girl. But it made me realise that fame comes as a cost. You may think you can become famous and carry on singing about God, but show business is all about making money. 'If it don't sell, you can't do it!' U2 is a classic example of what happens to Christians who try to break through into the world of show business with the idea that they can be a witness. They have all ended up in the occult, preaching for Satan instead of the one they once called their Lord Jesus Christ.

It Left me Cold

At one time I went to concerts to watch famous musicians perform. I have seen some extremely gifted celebrities and admired their talents. But all these people were displaying themselves, and showing what they could do. In some cases, performers were so technical, and could do so many clever things with either their instruments or their voices, that I was left cold. There was no emotion in what they did. Other times the artiste would manipulate the

audience so we were all swept away on a wave of emotion which would end up with the crowd on their feet giving rapturous applause. Stefan Grapelli was one such performer who, after playing jazz on his violin, had the crowd on their feet in adulation. The applause was long and thunderous. Nobody worried about his life style or character because it was his talent he was displaying, and people recognised and appreciated it. I felt totally detached as I watched him and his male backing musicians take their bows as wave after wave of applause went up. I thought to myself, 'He's acting like a god. Only Jehovah should receive this kind of praise'.

Christian Superstars

We now have Christian superstars. People who want attention. People who love the praise of men and want personal glory for their God given talents and gifts. I was going in that direction too, but God allowed me to go through the fiery furnace to knock all desire for wealth and fame out of me. Churches have become the equivalent of religious clubs into which we bring both fashion and entertainment. If you want to know how much 'salt' the church is in society, just look at the churches which are attracting the biggest congregations, and you'll see plenty of 'society' in the so called 'salt'. We can't

influence the world by becoming part of it. The two just don't mix. We have to leave the world, and the world has to leave us. We have to show a completely different life style. If what we do with our God given talents and gifts doesn't bring the conviction of God upon those who observe us, then we are at best just entertainers who have lost our way. God is interested in changing people, not systems.

Everyone an Extrovert

If you're salt you'll make some sort of difference wherever you are whether you're aware of it or not. When I was 25 I worked in an advertising agency. I actually loved that job. I suppose the whole ethos of advertising is to be creative and think of new ideas which will capture people's attention to sell products. Everyone who worked there was an extrovert, it didn't matter how bizarre your opinions were, whether personal or to do with the job, everything was valued and nobody was discriminated against. When I shared that I was a Christian and went to church nobody mocked me, but neither did it impress them, because there were others working there who were New Agers, or atheists, and one secretary in particular, her name was Hilary, had such a filthy mind that even these very worldly blokes would blush at things she said. Before this job I'd worked in offices where there

was so much backstabbing and cattiness amongst the secretaries, but here you could be as crude and brutally honest as you liked and nobody batted an eyelid, it was all seen as expressing yourself.

You're Holy!

It was whilst I was working at the advertising agency that my pastor started preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Wow, did that teaching batter me! I'd been going to church my whole life feeling blessed at what God had done for me but was now faced with how I should be living for God and it devastated me. Up until that teaching I never realised how wicked my old nature was. I remember feeling totally crushed one Monday after hearing yet another of these sermons the day before. I really wanted to be Christ-like but had so far to go. During the course of the day I needed to get something from Hilary so went to her office. She must have just made a mess of something on her typewriter as when I opened the door the air was blue with all the curses bellowing out of her mouth.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't realise it was you, Joanna. I wouldn't have spoken like that if I'd known it was you!"

I was really surprised and told her it wasn't a problem, she didn't need to apologise.

"Yes I do," she said. "You're holy!"

Her words stunned me and I looked at her trying to detect mockery in her eyes, but all I could see was genuine honesty in her face.

I practically ran out of her office to the ladies room. Staring into the mirror I wondered what she had just seen in me. I burst into tears. I'd felt so hopeless that day, but she must have seen Jesus in me ... and he'd made this foul mouthed young woman embarrassed!

It was Like a Revival

Very soon after this incident, a young lady in my office eventually came to the church after multiple invitations and got filled with the Holy Ghost before she'd even asked Jesus into her heart. Wow, the firm started buzzing. Without even an invitation, Hilary asked if she could come to church with me. She came with her two cronies whom she was always with at work. She spread the word about the church in the agency and one of the bosses together with two more of the staff came. It was like a little revival and I began holding bible studies and prayer meetings in the lunch breaks. I wasn't there long after these occurrences, God called me to full time ministry, but my remaining days at the agency were so exciting.

Don't underestimate salt. You don't need much of it to make a difference to any meal as you well know. All Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego did was remain standing when everybody else bowed – they didn't actually DO anything! All Daniel did was continue praying as he'd always done – his lifestyle didn't alter in any way. But look at the effect these men had on their society. If the lock down we've all experienced restricted you, or altered your habits, then you need to realise this world still has power over you. In my wildest imagination I just couldn't imagine either Jesus or his disciples wearing face masks and gloves, or not meeting with others and having fellowship. We need to beware of the things happening in the world today because Jesus said if salt loses it's saltiness, there's no way it can be seasoned again.

May God help us all.

Chapter Ten

Divide and Conquer

We need to keep focussed otherwise we shall be diverted from our calling of discipleship and loving one another, and the devil will have achieved his purpose ... which is to divide and conquer.

There were about four or five wasps flying round the ceiling of my bedroom at the end of a recent summer, but one looked as though it was dying so I tried to flick it off my curtain out of the window without damaging it. Unfortunately, the wasp didn't understand what I was doing and stung me on my finger. To my amazement the other wasps then started dive-bombing me because the sting I'd received was giving off some sort of signal for them to attack. It wasn't a nice experience, but it certainly taught me something. The wasps were looking out

for each other. They may be little creatures, who have little effect on their own, but they can be extremely dangerous when moving together. This wasn't a swarm by any means but even as a little group they had a great impact.

Healed on the Sabbath Day!

I've entitled this chapter 'Divide and Conquer' because this is a warfare strategy. The religious leaders in the time of Jesus knew about this method and used it to counteract the effect Jesus was having everywhere he went. In John 9, when Jesus healed the blind man on the sabbath day, the Pharisees tried to make the blind man's parents accountable by cross examining them. But the parents wouldn't speak for him, they disassociated themselves from their son by saying, "We know he was born blind, but you'd better sort it out with him, he's old enough to answer for himself!" They didn't want to be implicated because the Jews had agreed already that if any man confessed that Jesus was Christ he should be put out of the synagogue. That meant they'd be ex-communicated from everyone else, cut off from fellowship with other synagogue members.

We see something similar when Jesus actually raised Lazarus to life after he'd been dead three days. This was such a spectacular miracle that among the

chief rulers many believed on Jesus; but, because of the Pharisees, they didn't admit it for fear of being put out of the synagogue: the Bible actually says their fear was because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. They would have been excommunicated, cut off from fellowship, and classed as outcasts.

Jesus Knew His Time Had Come

On the night Jesus was betrayed he warned his close friends in John 16:32 that the hour was coming, in fact it had already come, that they would be scattered, every man to his own home, and would abandon him. He was talking to the very men who had forsaken all their home comforts to follow him. They'd been on the road together day and night having left businesses, and families, because they were learning to be disciples and emulating the same lifestyle as Jesus. But he said to them, "All of you shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered".

That word 'offended' means: to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey.

At that very moment, that very sacred moment, Jesus was making a new covenant with them sharing bread and wine which, he revealed, was spiritually

his body and blood that he was about to give as a sacrifice for the whole world. But these men had no idea what he was talking about.

Jesus knew what would happen and didn't judge them. He knew he was about to be crucified and part of this coming test was that he had to be abandoned and forsaken by his closest friends. He even encouraged them by assuring them that after he had risen from the dead, he would go before them into Galilee.

Offended by Jesus

Well, they were all offended, and after Jesus's arrest and crucifixion they all returned to their individual homes in bewilderment. Even though Jesus had warned and even spelled out what was coming, they were still caught out when it happened, because it happened suddenly. They'd felt invincible while this miracle working Jesus whom they believed to be the Messiah was around, but this turn of events traumatised them. They failed the test and didn't stand. They all disbanded and ran for cover to their individual homes.

But Jesus kept his promise and after rising from the dead sought out his friends to encourage and strengthen them to stand, to continue in their calling to spread the news of his coming kingdom,

and make disciples, even amidst tyranny and persecution.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to STAND against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to WITHSTAND in the evil day, and having done all, to STAND. STAND therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth **boldly**, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an

ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak
boldly, as I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:10-20

Did you notice that Paul asked for boldness? He was actually in prison when writing this exhortation, and was there because he was bold. Persecution, and intimidation, and torture are all meant to break your spirit and subdue you, and this was the very thing Paul was afraid of. He was constantly under pressure to cease and desist from doing what God had commissioned him to do so he asked for prayer that he would be even more bold.

Panic Buying

Make no mistake, we have a real enemy out there who is watching for our very souls to tear us away from communion and relationship with the family of God and make us castaways. We all witnessed during lockdown over these past few years an enormous onslaught of attacks by our enemy. Even before the onset of isolation in our homes we found to our amazement that toilet paper and soaps were depleted in our stores. Shelves in the supermarkets usually containing these items were empty as shoppers panic bought to stockpile, expecting the worst. Meeting places such as pubs,

clubs, and churches, together with shops, and schools were all classed as non-essential and closed to the public. As well as being forbidden to visit beaches and take walks in the vast open countryside, we were told to stay at home, self quarantine, and have no contact with anyone outside the immediate household we were living in, which included family. No visitors were allowed in hospitals or old people's homes, meaning that countless children and old people died alone without the comfort and support of family members. What on earth was going on people? I can understand the necessity to quarantine sick people, but it's utter madness and foolishness to do it the other way around.

Lockdown in Uganda

We know what it means to divide and conquer but we all allowed it to happen. I'm so grateful that Maurice and I were actually in Uganda when the 2019 lock down started. We'd gone there to speak at four conferences. We fulfilled the first two engagements but then it was announced that public meeting places were to be closed and no more than five people could gather together. We were stuck in a foreign country with nothing to do as our conferences had been cancelled, but we said to ourselves, "This is no coincidence!"

Our plane was the very last one to be allowed into the country without all the passengers having to self quarantine for 14 days as the government ruling had been given whilst we were still in the air, so we knew God meant us to be there. But now what do we do?

Meetings in the Bush

This caused problems for our hosts too. What were they to do with their guest speakers all the way from England? Well thank God a boldness arose in them, and us, and we said we would still speak even if it was only to a small number. The hosting ministers seemed to gain strength from what we said and arrangements were made for those who were not afraid to meet with us in the Bush. The penalties for disobeying were far more severe than we would experience in England but people turned up. We carried our plastic chairs out of the church and walked a distance into the bush where we placed them under shady trees to teach discipleship to these hungry men and women of God. It was an absolutely fantastic experience which I will always savour. It was so real. No warm up songs; no speeches praising this honourable bishop, or that mighty prophet, for attending the conference; no religious jargon; just personal,

uninhibited fellowship together where those attending could jump in at any point to ask for clarification concerning something we said, with chickens, and pigs, and goats, and noisy cockerels, and village people, all roaming around us freely. It was so real and beautiful.

Our final conference was meant to be in Kenya but the borders had been closed, nobody allowed in or out, so it was impossible for us to get to them. However, at the risk of being shot, some Kenyans found ways to cross the border to us so they could hear what we had to say. They actually risked their lives to meet with us for fellowship! Wow! We read stories of these brave members of the underground church in China and Russia, but we were witnessing the very start of the underground church here.

No One Warned Us

This lockdown happened suddenly. People are always talking to us about God doing things suddenly, and for some reason we always assume that the 'suddenlies' are all going to be good things. But Jesus talks about coming suddenly, as a thief in the night, when nobody is expecting him. Nobody expected a lockdown. It took us all by surprise. To my knowledge not one so called 'prophet of God' warned us that it would happen.

If Maurice and I hadn't experienced for ourselves what God did in Uganda maybe we would have been duped like everyone else to conform to the ungodly ruling of not meeting with the brethren, but God had prepared us and shown us the evil agenda behind it all.

World-Wide Test

This was a test. The governments of the world have tested the people to see if they can suppress them, and have found it to be very easy. But God has also been testing the Believers to see if they will allow themselves to be suppressed. Many Believers failed this test, just like the disciples did when Jesus warned them saying, "All of you shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered". All the disciples ran back home for cover. But Jesus didn't write them off, he encouraged them after he'd risen from the grave, and sent the Holy Ghost to strengthen and empower them, to STAND together.

There will be other tests coming. The net is tightening around the world. At the moment people have felt connected because they have internet, but the days are coming when that will be stripped away. How will you fellowship when there is no YouTube or Zoom? The very thing we have become

so dependent on will be the very thing world powers will strip away to torture and enslave us.

Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

Mark 13:12

The days are evil, things are going to get tougher. We are warned that in the last days we will be betrayed, so we need to find Believers we can trust with our lives and stand together.

Chapter Eleven

David's Rejection

I've already spoken in a recent chapter about how God rejected Saul from being king over Israel even though he had chosen him in the first place. Saul just couldn't find it in himself to follow God's instructions. He had to do things his own way. We serve a very forgiving God who gives people lots of chances, but if he's selected someone for a job in a prominent position where people look to them as their example, he has to deal severely with them if they disobey him because they're not allowed to take the name of the Lord in vain.

God spoke this to Saul through Samuel;

But now your kingdom shall not continue: the
LORD has sought him a man after his own

heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be captain over his people, because you have not kept that which the LORD commanded you.'

Samuel 13:14

God said this after Saul had reigned only two years, and David was not even born. Just a couple of chapters later in Samuel 15 we read:

And Samuel said unto Saul, The LORD has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbour of yours, that is better than you.

1 Sam 15:28

David was now alive and God had been watching him.

And when God had removed Saul, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Acts 13:22

Man after God's heart: what a statement! What made David a man after God's own heart? Well I'm going to read some scriptures to show that David

experienced and suffered the same emotional pain in his heart that God did. You see, David knew all about rejection.

But you are he that took me out of the womb: you did make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon you from the womb: you are my God from my mother's belly.

Psalms 22:9-10

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

Psalms 27:10

Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For you are my hope, O Lord GOD: you are my trust from my youth. By you have I been held up from the womb: you are he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of you. I am as a wonder unto many; but you are my strong refuge.

Psalms 71:4-7

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child

that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

Psalms 131:1-2

I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.

Psalms 69:8

You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.

Psalms 50:20

From David's Psalms we can see clearly how he felt regarding his upbringing. He didn't feel like an accepted member of this family. So what an incredible thing for God to instruct Samuel to:

...Fill his horn with oil, and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for God had provided himself a king from among his sons.

Psalms 50:20

Now Jesse was an old man, an elder who stood at the gate of Bethlehem.

And Samuel did that which the LORD spoke, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Do you come

peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

1 Samuel 16:4-5

So the family was sanctified and came for the meal. Jesse introduced each of his sons to Samuel but there was NO DAVID. David hadn't even been informed about the visit of this extremely honoured guest. Well, Samuel wouldn't proceed without him.

No David – No Meal

And the amazing thing about this is that even after Samuel makes it abundantly clear that his visit had been all about David, and anointed him in front of his father and brethren, David was sent back out to the field.

Samuel didn't say he was anointing him to be the next king, but surely they must have realised something very special was going on here. Talk about disdain!

Well, the Spirit of the **Lord** came upon David from that day forward. But the Spirit of the **Lord** departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the **Lord** troubled him.

Because of this Saul's servants looked for a minstrel who could refresh him. David seemed to have earned a reputation for the Psalms he sang so was brought to the palace to become Saul's minstrel and armour bearer. At last, David felt he had been recognised and had earned some respect, but sadly no respect came from his family because when war broke out between Israel and the Philistines David, who at that time must have been in his teens and too young to join the army, was sent back home. His father soon put him in his place, sending him back into the field to take care of the sheep. David was forever being humiliated.

Meeting Goliath

But shortly after returning home David's father sent him on an errand to the battle ground to see how his older sons were doing. David was packed off with cheeses for the captains of the army, and bread and corn for his three brothers who were supposed to be fighting out there. But what he witnessed amazed him!

One single Philistine – Goliath, a huge man who was ten feet tall – was shouting from the valley, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."

This Goliath was challenging the whole army of Israel to choose one man to face him. If the

volunteer Israelite could fight him, and kill him, then all the Philistines would serve Israel: but if he prevailed, and killed the Israelite, then all Israel would be servants to the Philistines.

King Saul and the whole Israelite army were petrified – and David couldn't believe it!

He looked around but all he could see was Israel looking like a flock of scared sheep.

What an Incentive

Just then he heard men talking of reward so David asked around, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine anyway that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Apparently there was a huge reward being offered: the victor would have great riches from the King, marry the King's daughter, and his father's house would be permanently free of taxes and obligations. What an incentive! Now he would surely be accepted as a valued member of the family.

Eliab, David's eldest brother, overheard the conversation and was livid!

"Why are you here? Who've you left those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know your pride and haughtiness, you've only come to see the battle!"

Well, you know what happened, David cut Goliath's head off. But the strange thing is that when Saul saw David go up against Goliath, he said to the captain of the host, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "I don't know."

And Saul said, "Enquire whose son the stripling is."

So, as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner brought him before Saul with Goliath's head in his hand.

And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?"

And David answered, "I'm the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite."

David had already been working in the palace, in the very presence of Saul playing and singing for him, but he realised yet again that he'd never even been noticed.

We've all Been There

You know, everyone has experienced rejection in some measure, it's common to man, and rejection comes in many forms.

From early days children know what rejection's like when they're not picked for the football team, or not invited to someone's birthday party, or not included in a circle of friends.

As we grow older it's hard to take rejection when applications for colleges, universities, or job interviews are turned down.

It gets even more painful when a boyfriend or girlfriend you've become emotionally involved with decide they can do better for themselves and move on to somebody new.

And how agonising is rejection when the very one you have committed to spend the rest of your life with decides they don't love you any more and want out of the marriage – and worse still if it's because they've already found someone else?

In one form or another our hearts go through the mangle during the course of our lifetime. But what do we do about it?

Well, I know people who have become so bitter that all they want is revenge. Because they've been shunned by their spouse they fight a legal battle in the divorce courts to take their partner 'to the cleaners', suing them for every penny to strip them completely.

In France they even make allowances for 'Crimes of Passion' because they understand the emotional anguish lovers are under when rejected, even causing them to commit murder!

Many people become so hard hearted and untrusting that they build walls to protect ourselves, vowing that nobody will ever hurt them again.

This is what the Old Testament prophesied of Jesus:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53:3

Jesus knew what to expect from people.

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:31

But first must Jesus suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

Luke 17:25

The Suffering God

Many years ago a young woman started attending my church. I was intrigued because she was a Muslim, so I asked her what brought her to faith in our God Jehovah and the Lord Jesus Christ. She answered, "I read the bible."

"Yeah, I've read the Bible. Which part did you read?"

She looked a bit puzzled then said, "It's a book! I started at the beginning."

She went on to tell me that after only reading through the first couple of books she was heartbroken over this suffering God. She felt so sorry for him. It seemed he had bent over backwards to win the love of the people he'd created, from his complete indulgence in the Garden of Eden, then starting all over again with Noah after his perfect creation had been ruined, but especially when God rescued the Children of Israel from Egypt with all his mighty signs and wonders. To her mankind had just kept slapping God in the face and abusing him over and over again. She said she just wanted to let this God know that somebody loved and appreciated him.

David knew all about rejection, but he loved God with his whole heart. And maybe because he himself had suffered so much, he wanted God to feel loved and wanted, just like this young Ex-Muslim woman did. He hated the way God was mistreated. When David became king he looked for ways to practically and openly bless his precious God. It was in his heart that he wanted to build God a house rather than him just being in a box, and even though God wouldn't allow David to personally build it because he'd murdered in his past, David drew up

the plans under God's directions and provided all the necessary materials to make and furnish it – all the wood, gold, silver, fabric, everything, so that his son Solomon could erect it. Solomon's Temple, as we call it, is actually David's Temple because Solomon just carried out the work David had commissioned. Which emphasises yey again David not being regongnised.

You're in good company when you're experiencing rejection. It's not necessarily a negative thing. All the prophets of God and the disciples of Jesus Christ were rejected, and the vast majority of them were martyred. Jesus said we had to beware when all men speak well of us for so persecuted they the prophets which were before us. If you're following Jesus Christ then you mustn't expect to be treated better than he was. But if we take our rejection patiently, Jesus said this is thank-worthy and great would be our reward in Heaven.

If you want to be a man after God's heart, embrace the rejection. Jesus was despised and rejected of men. And If you're suffering for righteousness' sake you're learning to understand your Lord. Those who suffer with Christ will reign with Christ.

Chapter Twelve

When the need becomes personal - it's a call

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

Exodus 2:5

Funny how things happen, isn't it? That little child in the basket was Moses. Because the Egyptian princess heard him cry and had compassion on him,

his life was spared from certain death. She saw his need and felt the call to help so spontaneously made an unpremeditated decision and ended up doing something completely unexpected. She didn't love the child, she'd had no relationship with it until that very moment, but she'll surely receive her reward for what she did.

Teaching Discipleship

Maurice and I haven't been called to evangelism. Maurice often says that he doesn't lose sleep at night crying about lost souls. Actually his heart cries for those in the church who call themselves Christians and yet live just like the world, because he's a teacher, not an evangelist. These Christians have the same world view as unbelievers; they listen to the same music, participate in the same activities, talk the same talk, walk the same walk, and have the same life style as the very people who oppose God, and Maurice yearns to teach them the difference between Christianity (the religion) and Discipleship (which is the need to be separate and holy for God's purposes). Maurice knows his calling and so never accepts invitations to preach the gospel, only to teach.

So, it was quite amazing to be fervently asked by an elderly Indian Pastor to visit his church in

Andhra Pradesh and TEACH the ministers whom he had trained. This man, Pastor Samuel, was surrounded by Hindu fanatics and faced much persecution, but pleaded with Maurice for help. We'd already made a promise to God that, if asked to teach and not preach, we'd go wherever we were invited in the world, so gave Samuel our word that we would come to him.

The Third World

Now ministering to people in the Third World was not what we had envisaged doing, it was certainly not something that appealed to either of us. Nothing really prepares you for the incessant heat or putrid stench of those dusty roads. You can't get away from it. But God was very kind as our host knew how to look after Westerners. We were provided with air-conditioned accommodation which included a fridge and a western toilet, and these were such a blessing. Samuel apologised for the fact he didn't have running hot water for our shower, but we stressed over and over again how grateful we were for the cold water which hit us every day ... and we truly meant it!

When we come across people who are poor we tend to think that they are also unintelligent and simple, but I saw for myself the tremendous hunger

these people had for the word of God. They soaked up everything Maurice had to teach them. They wrote pages and pages of notes because they wanted to make sure they remembered the teachings so they could pass them on to their own congregations. It was wonderful to minister to these church leaders, and it's no wonder Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples to tell John that the poor had the gospel preached unto them.

Bible School

As we fellowshiped, shared meals with, and warmly hugged these 'untouchables', our hearts opened up and both Maurice and I learned to truly love and appreciate them. Their simplicity was so refreshing. God notices and cares about poor people even though others with better social status often ignore and abuse them. Samuel shared with us his longing for a bible school so that he could properly train his ministers and we could see for ourselves this was a real need. Although we had no money personally we felt we did have a voice so promised to support him in his venture. We came home to England with a burden for these Indian pastors.

Some time after our trip to India we were contacted by a man from Nigeria. We had received many invitations from that country asking us

to preach the gospel and hold mass crusades, but this was different. For some time, apparently, this Nigerian brother had been receiving our bi-monthly newsletters we used to publish and translating them into local dialects, before duplicating and sending them out to neighbouring countries at his own expense. Because of this he was asking if he could call himself 'Barratt Ministries Nigeria' and be our representative. We felt we could not permit this unless we had met him personally so made arrangements to pay him a visit. We said we wouldn't stay in a hotel or guest house, we would very much like him to accommodate us in his home. We didn't say so, but really we wanted to vet him.

Oppressive Heat

The plane landed in Lagos and Surakat, our new found friend, rejoiced when he saw us at the airport. He and his family were so happy to have us in their car with them. What first hit us was the oppressive heat, then the roads – or should I say potholes connected with a bit of tarmac. The ride was terribly bumpy and took ages because we had to go really slowly to avoid the suspension of his car completely collapsing. But it was when we turned off the main roads and began to drive down the dirt tracks that I really began to fear. I looked at the tiny

shacks we passed to the right and left and wondered where on earth we were being taken. Surakat lived in the poor district so that he could help those with needs. He actually had a good job and could live in a nice area, but this is what he felt Christianity was about, so he was putting his faith into practice.

Power Sharing

I thanked God from the bottom of my heart when we arrived at his home for he lived in a brick building which had a western toilet. What a blessing! No running water, we had to fill the tank every time we wanted to flush the loo, but we didn't have to find a hole somewhere outside. Surakat gave Maurice and I his family bed and he and his family slept on the floor in the living area. They had worn out furniture and a thin carpet which had been given to them before being thrown out by people Surakat worked for. They even had a fridge and an overhead fan, but as their share of electricity was only one or two hours per day due to 'power sharing' we didn't manage to enjoy the benefit of these luxuries very much. When the electricity went off the main room was lit by a single tiny torch bulb which had been rigged up to a PP3 battery. Because our friends were black, all we could see was the whites of their eyes and their teeth when they smiled. When we moved

to other rooms we had to take a torch with us. Yet Surakat and his family felt so blessed because God had given to them things that others around them didn't have, and they did what they could to relieve the suffering of their neighbours by giving them food and other aids. What we hadn't been aware of was that Surakat had been delighted to have this opportunity to host us as he had wanted to see if we lived what we preached. He'd wanted to vet us! It was good to hear that we'd passed the test. Nike, Surakat's wife, even went so far as to say that we'd been far less trouble than her own family, and that was praise indeed.

Massacre in Kaduna

As Surakat was a police detective, a year prior to our visit he'd been sent to investigate some riots which had taken place in Kaduna, that's in the north of Nigeria. There had been some terrible tragedies when militant Muslims had persecuted Christians. Churches had been destroyed and many pastors and Believers had been killed or badly mutilated. A youth choir had been practising in one of the church buildings when the Muslims had locked the doors and set fire to the place. They had all been burned alive. Surakat saw the results of the massacre and had been burdened to help those children who

had seen their parents butchered. As it happened, we had already seen video footage of what had taken place because a missionary had asked us to help him make a film of this actual incident, so we had a keen interest. Surakat had a strong desire to build an orphanage for these traumatised children in Lagos where it was safe from Muslim persecution and we decided to help him realise his dream. We came home to England with yet another burden and got a friend to draw up plans for the proposed orphanage, put out the word that we needed financial aid, and the project got under way.

No Room at the Inn

The very next year we were approached by Frank, a young Pastor from Uganda, who wanted Maurice to teach discipleship to ministers from local churches. We again responded positively to the request and told Frank we would like to be accommodated in his home during our visit. Unfortunately, he said his house was too small, and nobody in his church had room either. He booked us into a modest bed and breakfast guest house and came each day, sometimes two or three hours before we were due to leave for the meetings, just so that he could listen to us and glean as much as possible whilst he had the opportunity. He was hungry, not

only for spiritual food, but he was very thin and very hungry for natural food. I wasn't used to eating a breakfast so I would pack up the things I would have eaten in serviettes and passed them on to him. He took these home to his family.

So Many Orphans

One day he invited us to his house to meet his family and share a meal with them. His wife, Stella, was pregnant with their first child as they'd only been married 18 months, and was cooking our food out on their tiny porch using a little camping stove. She didn't have a kitchen, indeed she didn't have a lot of things! Frank's house comprised just two rooms, the lounge and bedroom. No bathroom, toilet, or kitchen, but he felt very blessed indeed because the house was made of brick which meant that it was watertight in the rainy season, and rat free. We sat on the sofa in his lounge and his wife brought our food, then a little group of black children gathered around and stared at us as we began to eat. I thought these were children from the neighbourhood who had been inquisitive and had come in to stare at our white faces as they'd never seen them before. But I was amazed to learn that all these children lived with Frank. His wife had taken them under her wing and was already supporting them before

she was married, so now Frank had inherited them when he took on his new wife. He had taken in ten children whose parents had either died from AIDS or were too poor to feed them. I was astounded!

“Where do they all sleep?” I asked. He just moved his hands round in a gesture to say, “Anywhere!” They weren't particular. Wherever there was space, that's where they slept.

We Had to Help

This was so new to me. In the West we give to the poor from our excess, but here they were helping the poor because they had experienced poverty themselves and knew what it was like. Frank was so thin. Everyone knew Pastors were amongst the poorest of the poor and didn't earn much money, yet his heart couldn't refuse to help when asked even though he was in such a desperate situation himself. Maurice and I knew we had to help. We had no money of our own as we also were in the ministry, but we had friends, and a voice, and opportunities to make our voice heard. We promised Frank that we would do what we could to help and God enabled us to raise the funds to build him a temporary half way house which was twice as big as the house we visited. We then began to build an orphanage right next door to the half way house. We don't even own

our own house, but a need was staring us in the face and we couldn't ignore it. It became a call.

Some time ago I was talking with a policewoman who shared with me some of the every day problems she has to deal with in her job as she 'walks the beat'. She was telling me how she listens to some very tragic stories and witnesses some very awful things, but at the end of the day she can put it all behind her, and when she leaves the Police Station she also leaves the worries. They are professional worries, not personal ones. Often we can become hard to the heart cries of other people. Seeing so many desperate needs on the television has in fact desensitised us to the horrors of what they experience because they are just shadows on a screen which we can shut off by pressing a button. They are not really our concern.

A Call for Help

Surakat could have felt the same way about the children up in Kaduna. Frank could have felt the same way about the orphaned children left to fend for themselves on the streets. But somehow God had given them a revelation of the needs of others, which ended up as a 'call' for help. If your heart is open you can guarantee that God will fill it. Very often to overflowing. It can be very painful sharing someone else's problem, but 'a problem shared is a

When the need becomes personal – it's a call

problem halved', and your care could be the means of lightening someone else's very heavy load.

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; but you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what does it profit?

James 2:15-16

What good is that?

But whosoever has this world's good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:17-18

And here's a really serious exhortation to be more considerate and unselfish towards others, because it's going to matter very much to us, personally, when Jesus returns to judge the church:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before

him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? Or thirsty, and gave you drink? When saw we you a stranger, and took you in? Or naked, and clothed you? Or when saw we you sick, or in prison, and came unto you? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and you gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and you took me not in: naked, and you clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and

you visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto you? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Matthew 25:31-46

Finally, be you all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called, that you should inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:8-9

Yes, there's a blessing to be inherited when you have compassion towards others worse off than yourself. Particularly towards your brothers and sisters who are fellow Believers. Don't rob yourself of a blessing by being callous and hardhearted. God is no man's debtor, and when Jesus returns you will certainly receive your reward.

Chapter Thirteen

Wine cheers God & man

My husband really enjoys gardening and even though he's a very busy man he manages his time so that he can have an array of colourful flowers in the grounds all around our house. I like to look at the flowers but gardening has never been of any interest to me. However, I do have a fascination for fruit trees and bushes, and over the years I've managed to get my husband to plant a number of fruit trees, many of which I've bought myself, because I get a real kick out of seeing them laden with fruit. We have a fig tree, a very young plum tree (which actually produced eight plums last year), a pear tree (which has produced three pears to date since we planted it about seven years ago), we have an array of soft fruit bushes, strawberries, and two apple trees which are

well established now. To be honest the two apple trees alone keep me busy when the fruit ripens as the older tree produces so many apples I can hardly keep up with the chopping up and freezing. There are always buckets of fruit to distribute to friends and neighbours quite apart from what I can keep or use myself.

Me, a Gardener?

But earlier this year something wonderful happened. A young woman who fellowships with us brought me some tomato, sweet pea, and leek plants in little pots so that I could grow my own vegetables. My husband re-potted them after a couple of weeks into three garden boxes he specially made for me to go on the new patio he's just built at the front of our house, and told me these were my responsibility, I had to look after them.

Well every day, during the glorious summer sunshine which we all enjoyed here in the UK, I was out there watering my little plants. I'm afraid I lost the sweet peas, they just withered up after the transplant, but I continued caring for the others. I saw so much foliage and even flowers appear on the tomato plants which were a great encouragement as I'd never actually had success with any plants before. The rains have helped me and kept them

well watered. But how amazed I was when the little green tomatoes appeared where each of the flowers had been. I was in awe as I watched them grow each day in their little clusters. I even started talking to them, telling them how clever and beautiful they were, and what a blessing they were to me. But when the little green tomatoes turned colour and became little bright red cherry tomatoes, which when I picked and ate tasted so good, it filled me with real joy and satisfaction.

Learning From God's Creation

You may think I'm a little stupid, but we can learn so much by watching God's creation. I learned such a lot about how God deals with his children by watching my own children. Parents are so indulgent. We give of ourselves selflessly to protect, nourish, and care for our own offspring. We do absolutely everything for them from wiping their bottoms when they've messed up, to having endless sleepless nights when they're sick or in pain, because they're so helpless. We support them, on average, for around 20 years before they can take full responsibility for themselves or even think about marriage and having a family of their own.

But by watching fruit grow on the trees, and particularly on these little tomato plants, I've

learned so much more about how God feels about his valued and very precious servants. Yes, when we were reconciled to God by the precious sacrifice Jesus made, we were adopted into God's family and allowed to become children of God. God's so indulgent with his children. Just like as a father pities his child, God does everything for us knowing we are helpless and can do nothing for ourselves. But his great desire is that instead of him being of use to us, we become of use to him.

My Father's Business

Up until nearly 100 years ago children would learn their parents trade and follow on in their footsteps. Jesus had this mind-set too as when he went missing only to be found three days later in the temple at the age of 12, he asked his parents, "Didn't you realise I have to be about my father's business?" – meaning his Heavenly Father of course. And as far as his earthly father Joseph was concerned, well Jesus followed on in the family business and was a carpenter until the age of 30.

Ultimately God is looking for profit. I was really disappointed to lose the sweet peas as all my efforts had been wasted, but it was a completely different story with the tomatoes. Seeing them bear fruit has encouraged me to continue growing more next year.

You know God is a gardener. John 15 starts off by Jesus saying that he is the true vine, his father is the husbandman, and we are the branches. I can see things a little clearer now because I've experienced a tiny bit of what it's like to tend vegetables. I've been giving them quite a bit of attention, like weeding the garden boxes when I've spotted weeds growing beside my plants. I've removed dead branches and leaves which may take energy from the plant and made sure the stems are supported by tying them to sticks so the weight of the fruit doesn't snap them. And I've done all this just so that my little plants have every opportunity possible to produce good, healthy, tasty fruit. If I'm like this as a beginner, what is God like? He's the master gardener. Jesus said in John 15:

Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches: he that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

John 15:2-5

My little tomato plants don't have free will. They grow where I've planted them. If they don't like the soil, or the place where I've stuck them there's nothing they can do about it as they're rooted and fixed. It's possible, because I'm only a beginner, I may not have placed them in the ideal spot, or the best soil, but I'm tending them, and keeping an eye on them because I'm after a crop of tomatoes. The roots, the stems, and even the branches are of no real interest to me. I'm tending them only because I need them to be healthy to yield good fruit.

Jesus is the Vine

In this passage of scripture Jesus points out what's going on spiritually. He's saying that he's the vine tree and we're the branches. But unlike natural plants we each have free will. Jesus said we're clean through the words which he's spoken unto us. He's given so many instructions and commandments for us to follow, the main one being to love one another the same way he's loved us. We can be receptive to these instructions and allow the attitude of Christ (the spiritual sap from the vine) to flow through us as branches attached to the vine, or we can close our ears and block the flow which will eventually dry us up so that we are not only fruitless, but we'll die.

Let me show you how God views the vine.

Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken from a vine to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? (He's meaning to use it as a hook or peg). Behold, the wood is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it suitable for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was fit for no work: how much less shall it be fit for any work, when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

Ezekiel 15:2

Jesus said he was the true vine tree yet this passage from Ezekiel says that the wood from the vine is pathetically useless and fit for nothing other than starting fires, you can't even make a pencil out of it. Jesus came in flesh and blood, and was no different from us other than he was absolutely filled with the spirit of God. The bible says there is no good thing in the flesh. But that's exactly God's choice because Paul says in 1 Corinthians:

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God's chosen the

weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and God's chosen the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, and things which are regarded as nothing, to bring to nothing things that are:

1 Corinthians 1:27-28

But why is this God's choice? It's so that no flesh should glory in his presence, and the gardener gets the praise for any fruit that appears on the vine. God's the ultimate gardener and knows exactly the ideal circumstances for not only his vine to grow, but also to grow luscious, healthy, delicious grapes.

Known by it's Fruit

So what are the grapes, what's the fruit God's looking for? Well it's certainly not winning more souls – that would be like adding more branches to the vine tree, not fruit. No it's something that bulges and bursts out of the branches themselves when the life giving sap flows through them freely. Very often you can't tell the type of tree by the leaves alone, you need to wait for the fruit to appear. You can call yourself a Believer in Christ all day long, but words are just leaves. Jesus said the tree is know by it's fruit. If you have the life of Christ flowing through your spirit you'll show Christ's character, which is – love,

joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, & temperance. Judges 9:13 says that wine, the fruit of the vine, cheers God and man. So make no mistake, it's the grapes, the fruit, he's after.

Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law he meditates day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper.

Psalms 1:1-3

If you love God make friends of your own kind – mix with godly people. You won't find a vine with just one lone branch on it, there are many branches on a vine, so you need to be in constant fellowship with un-worldly, spiritually minded, God fearing Believers who love God with all their hearts and obey his commandments – the first and foremost being that we love one another as Christ has loved us. Accept God's skills at husbandry. Learn to love the ground where you've been planted, love whom you've been planted alongside, be thankful for the

place on the vine where you've been positioned. Yield yourself to God's constant pruning and attention. What a privileged people we are to be grafted onto the vine, and given an opportunity to cheer God's heart by showing the character of Christ displayed in us weak vessels.

Remember... When you were grafted onto the vine you were hand picked for this very purpose.

Jesus said:

You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.

John 15:16

Oh that we could all give God what he's looking for & cheer his heart. Let's bless him by giving him back a little in appreciation for all he's done for us.

Chapter Fourteen

Why am I different?

Have you ever wondered why you don't fit in? No matter how hard you try to merge and do what everyone else is doing, somehow it just doesn't sit right with you and you can't feel the same as everyone else, or participate in the same way they do.

I remember feeling 'odd' when I was at school. All the other kids my age were mad on pop stars and fashion. They could reel off their tongues the 'Top 20' songs in the hit parade charts every week. Most of the time I didn't even know the group or singer they were talking about, let alone the song, and certainly couldn't sing along with them. I preferred solitude and silence, and walks in the woods with the family dog so I could think. I'd have loved to

be with a friend, but I didn't really have any friends who were interested in the same things as myself. So when I did mix with other kids I ended up doing what they wanted to do, which made me prefer my own company. Now what I really did enjoy were things like: Sunday School; the Kids Club at the local Baptist Church; singing, whether it was in the choir at school, or solos; playing instruments; dreaming ...

Always in Trouble

I didn't seem to fit in with the family either. My older brother and sister thought I was Dad's pet so made life very difficult for me. Unfortunately, Dad didn't make it easy for them to like me as their job was to make sure I didn't get into trouble when I played outside of the house. If I fell and hurt myself, they would get into trouble. If I cried because I didn't get my own way, they would get into trouble. I know exactly how they felt about me because I got that treatment when my sisters who were six and ten years younger than me were born and I was expected to look after them in the same way my older siblings had to look after me. By this time Dad realised what a spoilt, loud mouthed, selfish little brat I had become and decided he didn't like me either.

The amazing thing is that God called me when I wasn't wanted by anyone. But then that's the wonderful thing about God, he sees what nobody else sees – our hearts.

Paul said:

God predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Ephesians 1:5

I was rebellious, cheeky, sharp tongued, argumentative, and yet the Pastor of the church I attended dangled promises of being the church secretary in front of me if I learned how to type. Learn? Me? The schools had given up on me. But this man showed he had faith in me and I wasn't going to let him down. I went to night school, learned how to type, and he kept his promise by making me the church secretary when I was just 15 years old!

God is so kind and tender. We may get misunderstood, ostracised, and hated by others, but the bible says that God has eyes which run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for someone to show himself strong in the behalf of, someone whose heart is perfect towards him. He's just searching for helpless people, who've come to

the end of their own capabilities and can't sort out their own mess any more, those who believe God is real and are calling out to him in desperation for help. God takes pity on people who are prepared to ask him for help because David the Psalmist says:

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

Psalms 103:13-14

No flesh is of any value, we came from dust and when we die will return to dust. But God picks up our messed up and broken lives and puts them back together again in the way he sees fit because he had a plan and purpose for us to fulfil before we were even born. A plan which we know nothing about.

I don't know why God intervened in my life but soon after becoming the church secretary my parents planned to emigrate to Australia to be with my oldest sister who'd been living there for some years. I refused to go with them, of course, as I didn't want to leave the church, but this caused problems for my parents as they were advised to either forget about emigrating if I didn't accompany them (I was classed as a minor), or else they should find someone who would take responsibility for me and become

my legal guardian ... and who would want to take me on?

My parents shared their problem with the Pastor and couldn't believe it when he said he would sign all the necessary paperwork so that they could go and I could stay. My family were very envious of my receiving such attention. They couldn't understand why such a godly man would give consideration to me and teased me incessantly, saying that he always coveted me for his family, which was nonsense as nobody wanted me. But I must admit I myself was stunned at the preferential treatment I was being shown by God. I had been given an unbelievable chance to change my lifestyle and I certainly wasn't going to pass up such a wonderful opportunity. I knew I had to change my character, and my family. God had already told me that I couldn't be a Christian if I continued living with them in that house as I'd end up going mad. I had to leave them.

I Was So Fulfilled

For many years I dedicated myself to serving God, the Pastor, and the church. My life revolved around them. I couldn't separate them from one another and loved them all dearly. I didn't only minister in the church, I often went out on evangelistic tours both in Great Britain and abroad

with my Pastor and the music group I was part of. I was so fulfilled, there was nothing else that could satisfy me. But as the years went by God began to speak to me.

It was very confusing at first because God told me to give up everything I was doing in the church. I questioned this thought. Surely God wouldn't tell anyone to do such a thing! We are supposed to use the talents he's given to us for him. I was always told that if you don't use what God has given you, you'll lose it, so how on earth could it be God who was saying this to me? Nevertheless, it niggled away at me and I told my Pastor what God had been saying. He was adamant I'd heard wrong. It wasn't God's voice I was listening to, it was the devil trying to deceive me. My reasoning said exactly the same, but I knew I'd heard God's voice.

I worked at Asda

Eventually I decided to make a move and gave up doing everything during the week and only play the piano and sing for the Sunday services. Other people filled in for me during the week and I continued on as normal on Sundays. During this particular period of my life I had a part time job (just 12 hours a week) at a supermarket which was a new branch of ASDA which had opened up near

me. I'd had the job a couple of months because I just wanted money to buy Christmas presents, but because of all the heavy items I had to lift from the conveyor belt and then stack in the shopper's trolley I ended up with a 'frozen shoulder'. The pain was excruciating and made it impossible for me to use my right arm for six weeks, so now, whether I wanted to or not, I had to give up playing the organ for the Sunday services in the church because God had made his point. He'd been speaking to me all right, and I had to obey ... Or else!

Back in the Pew!

Well, it was only a matter of a few months before God took me out of the church completely. Once I was off the platform and sitting in the pews like any other normal member of the church, I lost my 'protection'. Because my Pastor thought this to be a temporary situation, no explanation had been given for my stepping down so people assumed I was being disciplined for some misdemeanour. Well, they obviously had to put it down to something and they wouldn't believe my version. But the rumours flying round the church about me were so hurtful that I ended up throwing the towel in and leaving the church altogether. I just couldn't take it any more.

Once out of the church and away from my dearly beloved Pastor, I found God had brought me to another stage. Could I still be a Christian without those props? What a challenge! For the first time in my life I realised that there was a difference between church and God. I'd served the church and my Pastor with love and full commitment for 15 years, but where did God feature in my life if I didn't have those supports any more? I found that I had to begin all over again. I didn't want anything to do with church and membership, but I didn't want to leave God. It was just me and him now. It took me a while to figure out what was going on here and that this was no accident, it was actually what God had specifically purposed to happen. God had called me out of the system because I needed a relationship with him, not the church. He has to get rid of all the props we rely on (whether people or things) if we're going to have an intimate, personal relationship with him.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Romans 8:29-30

God has a specially detailed plan for the people he has his eye on. If God already knew you before you ever came to know him then nothing that happens in your life has come about by chance. Every situation in life that you go through has been purposefully designed to steer, manoeuvre, and direct you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ – to make you just like Jesus. Jesus, although conceived supernaturally, lived his life on earth as a man in human flesh, but he overcame the devil and temptation by refusing to live according to the dictates of his sinful flesh. He obeyed, served, and pleased his Heavenly Father every single moment of his life with such passion and fervent love that he is now crowned with honour and glory for his spectacular achievement. The bible says that those who follow Jesus's example will inherit the same reward and also end up being glorified like him.

A Serious God

I don't think people realise just how serious God is when he says of himself that he is a very jealous God. Jesus said, "Unless you are willing to forsake father, mother, sister, brother, wife, houses, and lands for my name's sake, you are not worthy of being my disciple." I always used to think this was a very harsh thing for Jesus to say, and maybe

he didn't really mean it in the way it appeared on paper. But I've come to realise that Jesus meant exactly what he said. In order for him to determine whether or not we are going to reign on this earth with him one day, he needs to know where our loyalty lies. If there's anyone, or anything in your life that's coming between you and God, you will need to deny yourself and forsake it.

Who are you With?

We've all heard the phrase 'no pain, no gain' which is often used in instances where we really want to achieve, like in sport, in education, and in so many areas of life, yet we seem to think that we can sail through our walk with God during this lifetime he's given us without having to deny ourselves anything. God needs to know who's with him. And in order to do this he needs to call us out of wherever we are trapped, be it our family circumstances, secular work, politics; and even the religious system we're trapped in ... because God is serious.

Something for us all to think about.

Chapter Fifteen

Doing the right thing with the wrong motive

We're all supposed to do things which are right and proper, but unless it's done with a pure motive, as far as God is concerned, it's not good enough. Never underestimate God ... he sees all. We can kid others, some of the time, but God is our witness ALL of the time.

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently:

1 Peter 1:22

Unfeigned love of the brethren ... have you ever wondered what that terminology means?

Right Motives

Some years ago God showed me a vision. In the vision I was sitting in a small fishing boat on a moat surrounding a castle and wanted to get through a portcullis in the water because on the other side there was a huge lake full of fish. Guarding the portcullis gate was an angel and as I approached he asked what my business was. I told him I was a fisherman by trade and needed to get through to catch fish. He just looked at me and said he couldn't open the gate because that wasn't a good enough reason. I was quite surprised by this response so I sat and thought for a while.

"Please let me through. There are hungry people and I need to catch fish so that I can feed them."

Again he just looked at me shaking his head, "I can't open the gate, your reason's not good enough!"

I sat there stunned. I couldn't for the life of me understand his attitude. Why wouldn't he let me through?

As I sat there looking through the portcullis wondering what to say next I saw an oil slick begin to spread on the surface of the water.

"Quick, quick, there's oil on the water. I need to get through. The fish are going to die, I need to rescue them!"

The angel looked through the gate and saw the oil and immediately sprung into action lifting the gate for me to get through, shouting, "I'm getting in the boat with you, I'm coming to help!"

Very often what we're doing is not necessarily wrong, it's the reason why we are doing it that is of concern to God.

Different Worlds

When God first sent my husband and I to third world countries I didn't really know what I was doing there. We saw the way these poor people were living but had very little understanding of their culture or the every day things they had to cope with. We just did our job and shared what God had put on our hearts to say. Our worlds are so different. I thought I'd be filled with pity and compassion, but contrary to this I was filled with envy for the community spirit and family life they all seemed to enjoy. They were so poor that they had nothing in their houses to stay in for so hung around together either working, chatting, and laughing, whilst the children ran around squealing with laughter playing together. It took me back to the time I was growing

up when there were no such things as computers, video games, or mobile phones and I realised what we'd lost.

For a few years I did my duty accompanying my husband because I didn't enjoy going to these countries, they were too hot, the food was strange, and we never knew what our accommodation would be like, whether we'd have air conditioning, mosquito nets, or even a western toilet. It was really hard work trying to overcome these inconveniences.

I struggled

The African women could see how I struggled. They watched every move I made and couldn't hide either their surprise or smiles when they saw me fanning myself as the sweat ran down my face, whilst they were wrapped up in shawls, holding their babies in blankets, and they'd often praise me for having such love for them that we would come and visit them. But to be honest I didn't really feel much love, I couldn't wait to get back to my own climate.

Thank God I had the opportunity to revisit the same people over and over again. They say familiarity breeds contempt, but I have also found that the more familiar you get with people the more you can learn to appreciate them. Once I got over my shyness at not knowing either their language or culture, and tried

to hold conversations with those who could speak a little English, I began to form real relationships. I got to know people in the congregations by name and listened to their stories of how God had rescued them. I soon forgot my own discomfort and when I heard what an encouragement we were to these people because of the things we taught them, my heart melted and I grew to love them as brothers and sisters.

Duty stinks to God. If you're only serving God because it's your duty then you might as well forget it because there's no sweet smelling savour coming from that. When people in Bible days brought offerings and sacrifices to God, they were meant to be willing sacrifices from a willing heart. If they were offered begrudgingly they were not acceptable to God.

Talk is Cheap

Maurice and I have a saying, 'if you can't change your circumstances, change your attitude'.

I believe God deliberately places us in difficult circumstances to see how we'll react. It's so easy to talk the Christian jargon, but can we live it? That's the question. Because talk is cheap.

Jesus couldn't tolerate hypocrisy and openly criticised the religious leaders for their shameless

behaviour. He instructed his disciples to act differently:

And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. (Meaning they've already received their reward because people praised them thinking they were great.)

Matthew 6:5

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Matthew 23:5-7

Every one of us can so easily appear to men to be holy and separate, and do all the right things outwardly, but still be hiding the true motives of our hearts

Have you ever held a birthday party for one of your children and invited kids you don't particularly like, or even the children of parents you don't particularly like? This may look like a really kind and

generous thing to do, but if your intention is just to swell the numbers and make your child appear to be more popular, and receive more presents, then this is pretty obnoxious. You are hypocritically welcoming them into your company if you, or your child, can't tolerate these other kids normally. You're just using them because they'll be coming laden with gifts. I know mothers and children who've done this.

Unacceptable Practice

There are pastors who preach the gospel and do their utmost to convert the lost only to brag to their fellow ministers that with a few more members tithing regularly they'll soon be able to afford the new extension to the church building. Preaching the gospel is good, getting sinners converted is admirable, but focussing on the new extension is abysmal and unacceptable to God.

I live right next door to a private hospital, in fact we share the same driveway. We made an agreement with them some years back to use our driveway to enter, and their private driveway to exit the premises, and this works fine during the week. But on the weekends the hospital is not in use so to my way of thinking there was no reason to use this one-way system and I would just drive out using our joint driveway. The problem was that Maurice saw

me do it a couple of times and told me off, saying I had to obey the rules. I thought he was being petty but Maurice said that's what I had to do so I obeyed. However, whenever he was away book writing I'd revert to what I'd always done. But one day, as I got back into the car after closing our gates behind me ready to set off the wrong way down our joint driveway, I felt a pang of conviction. We're always preaching what Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount, and it came back to bite me. Jesus said :

You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: (in other words, give back as good as you get) but I say unto you, that you resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloke also. And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two miles.

Matthew 5:38

Having your face slapped and not retaliating is duty, offering the other cheek is more than duty. Going one mile is duty, offering to go an extra mile is more than duty. Having your coat taken as payment when sued at court is duty, offering your opponent your cloak as well is more than duty. Jesus

said, **If you love me** keep my commandments. You can prove whether you love Jesus or not.

Well I sat in the car ready to drive off the wrong way and I could hear Maurice in my head telling me to drive the right way, and in that moment I had a little conversation with myself,

Rebellion Sorted!

"Do you love Maurice?" Well the answer to that was, yes, of course.

"Well, in that case why are you being rebellious and finding it irksome to do what he asks?"

Good question! Why was it irksome? I saw that I was being stubborn because I was proud and didn't like being told what to do. It was easy to see I was wrong.

"Yes, I do love Maurice, and I do love you Lord. And to prove I love Maurice I'm going to obey him when he's not here and do what he asks because I want to please him".

Then I drove off using the correct exit with a lovely warm feeling in my heart knowing I'd overcome another rebellious habit. Ha ha ... we're full of them!

We have to think seriously about why we are doing what we are doing, because the root of everything is important to God. He can get sinners

and evil people to do good things – you only have to watch ‘Schindler’s List’ to know that. Here was a covetous man, thankful that war had broken out, bent on making money out of other people’s misfortunes. He didn’t care less about the Jews. He wanted the cheapest work force possible so rather than employ the Polish people he took on the Jews, simply because he didn’t have to pay them. In German eyes they were of less importance than rats. It was God who moved Schindler to do what he did when he saved hundreds of Jews from the gas chambers. It was God who gave Schindler popularity with the Germans so that he could purchase so many people with the money he had made in business. It was God who changed Schindler’s attitude towards the very people he had once despised. As soon as the war had ended Schindler’s God given mandate was done and he reverted back to what he was. His marriage failed and so did his business. But God had done what he wanted through him.

God's Donkey

If you only want to be the donkey that God uses because the people God is trying to speak to refuse to hear, and there is nobody else around at the time, then God will put you to service. But if you want to be regarded as someone he can trust

to do specific tasks at specific times, and for what we have done to be of value (which will be storing treasure in heaven), then it's important to deal with our attitudes and do whatever we are doing with the right motives, because God does not deal with words, he sees the heart.

Chapter Sixteen

Never judge someone based on a season

I've been thinking about how easy it is to jump to conclusions, and maybe that's because of some of the reactions I've noticed in people who haven't seen me for 30 or 40 years. They presume I'm the same person now as I was then, but we all grow up and very often move on, and it should certainly be that way with Believers as we should be getting more and more like Jesus.

And if any man thinks that he knows any thing,
he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

1 Corinthians 8:2

In context this verse is actually referring to our interpretation of scripture, but I also think it's true of the way we view people & situations because the verse following says:

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

1 Corinthians 8:3

We jump to conclusions because we have some knowledge, but somebody once said. 'A little learning is a dangerous thing', and I believe this is so true.

We are on a Journey

As parents, we often look at our children and wonder what or who they will be when they grow up. We might have dreams for their futures, but life has many twists and turns and we just have to wait and see how things unfold. We are all on a journey. We never come into this world at our destination, we all have to start our journey from somewhere, so we should continually check ourselves and not jump to conclusions about anyone because we have no idea where they are on their journey, nor what or who they will become. We may feel very disappointed with them at

present but we should never judge anyone based on a season in their lives.

Who would have imagined the twists and turns that would take place in the life of Joseph? This poor unfortunate young man, who was the apple of his father's eye, experienced such hatred and rejection from his own brothers that his very spirit must have been crushed when he was torn away from all he knew and loved to be physically sold into slavery by them at the age of 17. How does anyone survive an experience like that? There's no coming back from slavery. Joseph had no rights whatsoever and was kept alive only to fulfil his masters pleasure. After being falsely accused of rape he was thrown into prison, yet even in this situation, because he feared and loved God, he served his captors to the best of his ability. To all intents and purposes he was dead to the world and the world was dead to him. A slave who'd been thrown into prison could only expect to rot there.

Only One Season

That was one season in his life – he was a prisoner. But while ever there is breath in a person's body there is always an opportunity for God to intervene. Who, in their wildest imagination, could have foreseen that one pronouncement from the

very Pharaoh of Egypt's mouth would alter Joseph's destiny from being a slave prisoner one moment to becoming the Prime Minister of Egypt the next to whom everyone in the known world, with the exception of only the Pharaoh, would bow?

But Joseph was not an exception. The bible shows there were many who experienced exceptional transitions in their lives and we are to take note of them because it shows us how God can take the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.

Only a Shepherd

David was also rejected by his family and sent out into the field to look after his father's sheep. Even when Samuel, that mighty and feared prophet of God, invited all David's family to attend a feast in Bethlehem David wasn't notified about the event. They excluded him and left him in the field with the sheep. David was despised by his family. To them he was good for nothing other than looking after sheep and singing his little songs whilst playing his harp. They must have considered him to be too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. In their wildest imaginations not one member of David's family would have dreamed that the feast Samuel was calling was all about David whom he would be anointing to be the next king! One season in David's

life he was the singing shepherd, but the next season he was King of Israel.

The New Testament gives some marvellous examples too. Just look at that zealot Saul who during one season of his life was breathing out fire and brimstone as he hunted down and slaughtered the early Christians without consideration as to whether they were male or female, and even convinced himself he was doing God a service. The Believers were terrified of him. Yet after being knocked off his horse and blinded by the dazzling brightness of Jesus, he turns out to be the apostle who willingly put his body on the line to suffer physical abuse more than all the others. One season he was persecuting the Christians, the next season he was showing us all how to suffer persecution and count it all joy for the crown that is set before us.

Looking for True Love

There are women too who've seen different seasons. Take Mary Magdalene for instance. One season she was a prostitute who was so messed up and entangled with sin and vice that she was even devil possessed. But after meeting Jesus she was radically transformed. This tormented woman realised what true, pure love was and devoted her whole future to faithfully serving her Lord and master. One

season she was just a piece of meat which any man used and abused, the next season, out of the great number of disciples and followers, she was the very first person to whom the risen Jesus chose to reveal himself. Oh how Jesus must have been blessed by the thankfulness and love which oozed out of this forgiven woman's heart and spirit.

There was also another woman whom Jesus met and conversed with at a well. His disciples had gone off to buy food so whilst on his own with her he asked for a drink of well water. One season she was a flighty female who had already had five husbands and at that very moment was involved in a scandalous affair with yet another man, but the next season she had the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah all Israel had been waiting for and evangelised her city causing many to follow Jesus and preparing the way for his visit to her area.

The Bible is such a precious gift to us all from God.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

If we read it and get to learn how God works and deals with people then not only will we be less likely to judge, but we will be filled with hope, because we'll realise it's not how we start the race that matters, it's how we finish.

It's not only the Bible that contains these wonderful stories of transformation, I've witnessed many people in my own lifetime who have had a massive turn around. I remember one man in particular. He was short, vicious, and Irish. What a thief this man was. He had such a gift of the blarney that when robbing stores of fridge-freezers and massive wall mounted television monitors he would actually commandeer the staff to help him get these items through the security doors without them ever realising they'd not been paid for. He was such a vicious little man that whilst in prison one time he got into a fight with a big guy over an ounce of tobacco and severely cut him up with a chisel. One season he was in solitary confinement in prison regarded as a thief and menace to society, the next season Jesus personally met him in that very cell and changed his life completely without any priest, or pastor, and he ended up working with the police to **recover** stolen property ... he rescued children who had been stolen for the sex trafficking trade.

I know many parents are worried sick about their children. What an age to be bringing children

up in! What chance do young people have when all the debauchery that's on offer around them is not regarded as sin, it's all classed as experience? I know many young people who didn't particularly want to go to university for an education, in reality they actually wanted to experience the lifestyle of unbridled drink, drugs, and sex outside of any parental control. Modern music and social media have hypnotised our kids into believing all the hype regarding living for pleasure and being free of responsibility.

Prodigal Son

I think of the story Jesus told about the wealthy man who had two sons. The younger son was too impatient to wait for his father to die, he wanted his inheritance now! So his father indulged him by giving him his portion of the inheritance and his freedom. Wow, the young man was like a dog with two tails. He left home and began to travel. Because he was throwing his money around he attracted many friends who enjoyed his parties with all the free food, drink, and prostitutes he provided. But when his money ran out his new friends abandoned him and he was left destitute. He needed a job but had sunk so low that he could only find work looking after pigs, and hunger forced him to eat pig

swill. But it was at this very low spot in his life that he came to his senses and began to think straight. He remembered his wealthy father and thought of all the people his father employed. Perhaps he could go back home and ask for a job – it would surely be better than what he was doing looking after pigs.

Many young people who've trod this road get to the end of their tether. They're sick and tired of the lives they've led. realising it leads to nowhere but unhappiness and unfulfilment. They've wasted all their opportunities but feel they've gone too far to ever be forgiven and accepted again. I've spoken with homeless young people and asked how they ended up on the streets. Some of the stories would break your heart, we have no idea of the tragedies some people have had to live through, and in the majority of cases they are where they are because of broken relationships.

Don't Judge too Soon

Never turn your back on anyone, especially your children, no matter what they've done. You may be the very last person they'll run to, but welcome them home. That's what the father of this wayward boy did in the story Jesus told. He could have been so angry at his son squandering all his hard earned money, but every day he looked out to

see if his boy was coming back home. And when he did see him coming, he ran out to meet him and made a great big fuss over him. He threw a party to celebrate the fact his son had returned to the family. Be careful not to judge people. Jesus came to give his life so that he might deliver us from this present evil world, yes, the world we are living in is very evil. Attractive and enticing, but very evil. It chews people up and spits them out without pity. Your children may reject God now, but it's not the end of their story either. As Corrie Ten Boom says, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still". We should never judge anyone based on a season in their lives, for while ever they have breath in their bodies there will always be an opportunity for God to intervene and transform them.

Other books by Joanna

Experiences from Life
Learning from Life
Lessons from Life
Play the Man
Fighting for Your Destiny
It's Past Midnight
The Kingdom of Heaven is Like
The Power of Women
Father of Faith

All books are available from Amazon as
Paperbacks or Kindle downloads

or from the Barratt Ministries shop
[bm-media-7422.myshopify.com](https://www.myshopify.com/bm-media-7422)