



unseen footprints

by Keith Glasgow

tracing God's will in our lives

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Keith grew up in Brisbane and Melbourne,
and spent his last 2 years of schooling in India
where his father took a teaching
position at a Christian school.

He gave his life fully to Christ at age 21
and spent many years in New Zealand
where he met and married Marg.

For eighteen years Keith served the Lord
in itinerant evangelism.

In 1996 he returned to Australia
to take up a position as Senior Pastor
at Canterbury Gardens Community Church
and then, after 10 years they moved to Edge Church
where Keith served as Senior Pastor for 5 years.

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UNSEEN FOOTPRINTS

FORWARD

The autobiography of G.H. Lang, "An Ordered Life", had a life-changing effect in my early Christian experience. It moulded my thinking and set me up for the adventure of serving God. I was eager to follow the Lord, but was unsure of His will for my life. The book was not a theological treatise on the subject of knowing God's will, but the story of God's providence and sovereign control in the life of one of His servants. It illustrated principles of guidance rather than explicitly teaching them.

Today there are many books available to help Christians learn how to find God's will in their lives. Another book would add nothing new. I am not therefore writing to give an analytical or structured thesis on God's guidance. Rather I am following the example of G.H. Lang.

This book contains personal experiences of the Lord's guidance over the past twenty years. Though autobiographical in nature, it is married to unchanging principles of the way God leads His people.

In Psalm 77:19 Asaph celebrates the great deliverance which the Israelites experienced when Jehovah set them free from the Egyptians and led them through the Red Sea.

*"Your path led through the sea,
Your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen"*

God was not leading His people in person. Though His footprints were unseen, His guidance was unmistakable. Likewise today, every disciple of the Lord Jesus will be able to look back on life and discern the unseen footprints of their Master.

Good and bad decisions, triumphs and tragedies, fulfilment and failure will all be seen to be under the sovereign control of God.

The Lord has been a faithful Friend, a trustworthy Counsellor and a stable Rock. I have found that the more I know Him, and understand His amazing nature, the less sweat and uncertainty I experience in doing His will.

My life is not spectacular. But whose is? Yet the excitement of depending on God for direction and grace lifts Christian living to a level of fulfilment and praise which is truly spectacular.

This kind of living is not reserved for missionaries! It is the portion of all who willingly place their hands in the Hand of the Lord Jesus, and step out to live a life of faith.

PLEASE NOTE:

The personal experiences narrated in this book are not in chronological order. They have been selected to illustrate the principle of guidance being taught in each respective chapter.

dedication

This book is dedicated to my very special wife, Marg, who has been a constant source of encouragement and wise counsel through many years of ministry.

Her willingness to put up with a modest life-style, an often absent husband, and the pressures of ministry, will not lose it's reward.

Chapter 1

OUT OF THE CHRYSLIS

PRINCIPLE

Applying God's soveriegnty to important decisions sets us free from the chrysalis of doubt and fear. We can move ahead confidently and securly knowing that God's purpose for our lives will not be frustrated.

“O Lord,” I agonised, “please reveal your will to me.”

I moved on my knees and wriggled my toes to accelerate the movement of blood. I continued earnestly in my prayer marathon. “O God, you know my heart; I really want to do your will! I don’t care what you want me to do, only please show me.”

Day after day I was so taken up with my search for God’s direction that I wasted hours of time, lost sleep, and almost drove my wife insane.

Marg and I had met about the time when I gave my life to Jesus Christ. He changed me powerfully. I was immediately motivated to serve Him. Even marriage did not change my desire. I would be up early in the morning to study God’s Word, and as I grew in the Lord I threw myself into any opportunities of service open for me.

We belonged to a small but growing Open Brethren church in Auckland. One elder in particular, Fred King, took a special interest in me, and encouraged me to serve the Lord. He was a board member and part-time lecturer at the N.Z. Assembly Bible School. One Sunday morning he asked me “Are you coming to the Bible School Graduation?” Marg and I thought “Why not?”

As the students received their diplomas it occurred to me that I too could go to Bible School. I had seen students take church services on Sunday evenings and thought of them as spiritual giants. In reality I was only a new believer, and would not dream of putting myself on the same level as them.

Though brought up in a Christian home and taught the Word of God, many years of rebellion and sin had separated that early life from my recent commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But God used that graduation ceremony to change my mind, and after the programme I spoke with the retiring Principal Mr. Tyler. He encouraged us to attend.

Marg and I talked and prayed about it. We decided it would be a good idea and spoke with Fred. He was delighted, and so we began to make plans.

I was drawn to the idea of serving the Lord full-time in evangelism from the time I committed my life to Jesus Christ. This sense became an unshakeable desire over the months at Bible School. Studying God's Word brought a deep conviction that the world should know the gospel. I had a continuing inner urge to answer the call of God and preach the good news.

At this point Marg did not share my sense of call but was willing to obey the Lord if He guided us into full-time ministry. As the months passed and the date of our own graduation drew near, there was no open door, no direction, no evidence of God's guidance at all. Alone and together, and with the other students, we had prayed for direction.

But the Lord was silent. Gary Monaghan was excited about his call to Brazil. Others were going to Totara Springs Camp to serve the Lord. We were just as motivated. We were prepared to go anywhere! "O Lord," I agonised, "please reveal your will to me."

A week before we finished Bible School I happened to overhear Neville Taylor, the Principal, in conversation with evangelist Colin Graham. "He's a young evangelist" he said about me, to which the other replied emphatically "There's no doubt about that".

I was greatly encouraged but confused. If others now recognise God's gift and calling in my life, it only confirms what God has put into my heart. Why is the Lord not guiding me?

Fred King was a very practical man. I remembered him saying that if the Lord does not clearly guide you, then just do what you would normally have done. That meant getting a job.

Though I had earnestly sought the Lord for an open door to serve Him, nothing had happened. I was forced to find employment, so I worked in a temporary job at the Westfield Freezing Works.

Every morning in my den I would open the Scriptures and put on my guidance spectacles! I would look for some word from the Lord about our future. Surely the Lord was going to guide! I prayed long and fervently. "O God, show me your will. Here I am, twenty-five years old, having been through Bible School, and all I'm doing is cleaning sheep carcasses in a slaughter house!" I felt like a ship that had left port only to end up at sea without a compass or any directions.

As I sought the Lord He was gracious to me, speaking through the Bible passages I read. He directed my thoughts to the Lord Jesus who, at the age of twelve clearly knew His calling. He desired to be in the Temple, going about the business of His heavenly Father. Yet His life's calling, important as that was, had to be set aside while He continued to live in obscurity; working in the carpenter's workshop until the time for His public ministry.

Those long teenage years as he chipped, hammered, and cut wood alongside His earthly father would not have been a frustration to Him. As He grew into His mid-twenties, the desire to serve His heavenly Father would have been no less than mine at the same age, yet I was in a continual sweat about my future. Why would the Lord Jesus calmly and confidently pursue a menial task year after year? All the time He knew the enormous need around Him, and His unique calling to provide the answer to that need.

I was bound up in a chrysalis of my own making. The only way to be free from my frustration was to learn from the Lord Jesus the secret of His peace.

His peace did not come from ignoring the need or forgetting the call on His life. He had an unwavering faith in His Father. The Lord Jesus knew that nothing would hinder His Father's purpose. God's plans would never be frustrated. As Paul later said "The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). "For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

I began to appreciate the sovereignty of God. I had known that He was the Ruler of the universe, but this belief had not filtered down into my daily living. God is in control of all things. Small and large events are all small to Him. Good and bad circumstances are all in His mighty hand. He uses them to fulfil His loving purpose in our lives. If He is not in control of everything, He is not in control at all!

I reasoned that, as I sincerely desired to do His will, God would not let me miss out on it! Behind the scenes He would control people and events to bring about what He had planned for us.

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; He directs it...wherever He pleases" (Proverbs 21:1). He can open doors that no man can shut, and shut doors that no man can open. I just needed to trust Him and keep serving Him in the place He put me.

I decided to accept the fact that it was not the Lord's time for us to leave secular work. Not knowing how long we would have to wait, but expecting it would be at least two or three years, we started praying for a good job.

While working in the Freezing Works I decided to start memorising Scripture in earnest. Our church had recently held a crusade with Maori evangelist John Komene. His preaching and his knowledge of God's Word impressed me. He would quote verse after verse in support of what he was saying. He had memorised great chunks of the Bible.

I knew that if I was to preach with the authority he had, I would need to do the same.

My job at the freezing works was to wash the rumps of the freshly killed sheep as they passed in front of me on the chain. After five minutes I was bored! Each day I took with me a passage I had cut out of an old Bible and glued onto a card. I rested it on a steel beam just above my eye level. During the day I read and re-read each verse until I knew it without looking.

Waiting time was not wasted time. The Lord let me learn Scripture all day and get paid well for it!

I sincerely wanted to use the waiting period to prepare myself for our ministry. The Lord honoured this desire. He led me into a job where He could train me in ways I did not expect. I began work as a medical representative for a pharmaceutical manufacturer .

My job was to read up on the company's prescription drugs and also those of our competitors. Five years of critical analysis of drug trials, and continual reasoning with doctors, made me more effective in presenting the truth of Jesus Christ to a secular society. I learned that some drug trials can twist the truth. I had to sharpen my ability to think logically, and not accept a conclusion without weighing the evidence.

Every period of a Christian's life is a training ground for the next. Though I was impatient at times over the five years, I gained far more than I lost. Submission to the Lord always proves best in the end. His way is perfect and His time for everything is worth waiting for.

Being a pharmaceutical representative let me continue to memorise and study God's Word. I was only able to visit an average of four doctors per day due to long periods of sitting in waiting rooms. I soon became tired of flicking through magazines, and started taking study books in my attache case. I would prepare sermons for the following weekend and revise Scripture memorisation.

My company also put me through training courses where I learned principles that have helped in equipping others in personal evangelism.

The five years of waiting could have been frustrating if I had remained trapped inside the chrysalis. But we experienced a wonderful freedom in knowing God's sovereignty over our lives. We were convinced that nothing could frustrate His purpose for us.

However, like every lesson we learn from God, there are times when we forget.

During those years there were times when I began to fret. Often it was linked with a new idea I had dreamed up of how we should serve the Lord.

One day I came bursting into the kitchen.

"Hey, Honey! I've got this incredible idea!"

Marg looked at me with reserve. I knew I would have to work hard to convince her.

"Honey, you know how the Lord has called us to serve Him in evangelism; well, I have been driving past a beautiful property in Mangere which would be ideal for setting up an outreach centre."

I held back the dining-room chair and Marg sat down silently as I proceeded.

"Imagine a camp without sleeping quarters in the centre of Auckland. We could set it up with a swimming pool, tennis courts, a flying-fox and a gym. There could be horses, go-carts and other fun activities for kids to enjoy. It would draw young people from all over, and be an excellent place for reaching them with the gospel."

Marg was not convinced. We placed the idea in the Lord's hands and went on with our work. The Lord had brought us together with a balance of personalities in our marriage. My enthusiasm if left unchecked would doubtless get me into trouble. Marg's enthusiasm would not rise until she was sure of the Lord's direction.

We have often thought of the Scripture, "Two are better than one" in this regard, and praise the Lord for giving each of us complimentary gifts and personalities.

Marg's reserve proved right. Over the following weeks as I thought and prayed about it, nothing happened to indicate the Lord's leading. At the time I was reading about Moses in my quiet-time every morning. Though he knew he was called to serve God, he had to wait forty years before he could do it! Once again the Lord was saying, "Wait". The idea of an outreach centre dimmed. It had not been a conviction placed in my heart by the Holy Spirit.

Another idea gripped my imagination. It was to set up a retreat where couples could go to rebuild their marriages and home lives. It would be ideal for introducing people to the Saviour and meeting a desperate need in the community.

As we prayed, the Lord brought to my attention another Bible character, David. He had been called by God, but spent many years as a fugitive before the Lord fulfilled His purpose in his life. Like Moses he also had to wait for God's time.

Other ideas percolated in my mind during those years. Marg became unsettled, not knowing what I would think of next! Once, we attended a missionary conference where Colin Tilsley, the founder of G.L.O. Missions, gave a challenge about the need in the Philippines. We started praying seriously about it.

I thought that maybe this was what God was wanting after all. Marg was not convinced, though as a good and faithful wife she was willing to go should the Lord guide us.

We went to see Fred, who wisely questioned Marg about the way she felt. She admitted that she had no call, and was not very happy about the idea. Fred sat me down and spoke to me straight.

He told me that, in a major decision like this, both husband and wife had to agree. Only then could it be God's will.

Once again I went on with selling medicine. Each time a new idea arose, the Lord blocked it. I had to trust Him, but I found it more and more difficult to put my heart into my work. My heart was in serving God. I was busy for Him in my own time, and legitimately using company time to study. But my greatest desire was to devote myself fully to reaching people with the gospel.

Through the closed doors God gradually brought me back to the original plan of serving Him as an itinerant evangelist.

The waiting time was not wasted! When this apprenticeship was complete, the Lord opened a door which no one has since shut.

Reflecting on those long months and years of waiting, we are now convinced that, had we moved ahead into serving God before His time, we would have reaped a sad harvest. God's time is as important as His will.

Though it was not easy to wait we learned to trust God. He has the best end in view for us, and He knows the best way to reach that end. His time is perfect. His control is complete. He is trustworthy.

*"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower."*

William Cowper

Chapter 2

THE A W L

PRINCIPLE

Submission to God's will is not giving in to God, but giving Him the right to choose what He knows is best for us. A genuine submission to God's will, whatever that may be, is essential for discovering His direction and purpose for our lives.

It was close to 1 am when I put down the book and decided to go for a walk. The night sky sparkled and the full moon danced on the lake as I looked down from the doorway of our cabin. It was a warm summer night and the air smelt fresh and sweet. I looked towards heaven and began to pray as I made my way down to the water.

On my heart was an invitation to preach at a city-wide crusade in Owerri, Nigeria. It was appealing for a little-known evangelist to preach to thousands in a football stadium. I was deeply conscious of the need to respond with the right motivation to this exciting opportunity.

When the first letter had arrived from Bishop Nkemakolem I had phoned Dick Treasure. Dick was an elder I respected for his honesty. What was more, his counsel always flowed from a deep love and concern for us. His response to the invitation was negative. He suspected a huge crusade would be a great attraction to my ego, and he lovingly cautioned me. When I put down the phone I simply prayed, "Lord, I will not go any further with this unless you change Dick's mind".

Thirty minutes later I picked up the phone to hear his voice once again. "I have spent the last half hour on my knees," he said, "and I believe you should go to Nigeria".

Within a few weeks the Lord had supplied the fare and I had obtained an entry visa. The plan was to fly to Nigeria to visit the churches of Owerri and prepare for the crusade. It seemed a huge waste of money to go so far just to meet the Christian leaders and discuss plans. But God had obviously opened the door.

Now, almost a year after returning from that preparatory trip, I was standing in the moonlight at the edge of the lake at Kiwi Ranch Christian Camp, Rotorua. Over the months, as the crusade drew closer, I had an increasing uneasiness of spirit.

On the one hand God had clearly enabled me to make the first visit. Yet I sensed that perhaps it may not be the Lord's will for me to return. I resisted the thought, reasoning that it was too good an opportunity for the Lord to say no. Also, many people around New Zealand knew of the plans. If I changed my mind and cancelled the crusade I would lose face.

We were at a conference at Kiwi Ranch, and I felt the need to spend time alone with God. After reading the Bible on my knees and praying, I read a chapter from "Daring To Draw Near" by John White. He showed how Moses decided not lead God's people unless the Lord went with them. God had offered to send an angel with them. But He would not go Himself because of their wilful sin (Exodus 33:1-3). Moses wisely saw the complete futility of going ahead without God's presence.

I opened my heart to the Lord as I walked around the water's edge. "Dear Father, the crusade in Nigeria is such a wonderful opportunity. I would gladly sell our car in order to be able to share the gospel with so many people. Yet, Lord, I dare not go unless you go with me. Dear God in heaven, please stop me if you do not want me to go. I would rather lose face than step out and do anything on my own."

"You are my Lord" I went on, "You are my Master and I am yours, do with me as you like. Once again I give you the right to fulfil your own purpose in my life, whatever that might be".

I looked back to the camp buildings and felt an inner release. Once again I had come to the point of surrender to which I had committed myself many years before.

I knew my prayer-time was over. I could go to sleep in peace now.

Within a few weeks of that prayer my application for an entry visa to Nigeria was refused with no explanation.

The letter arrived just three days before I was due to fly out. I tried desperately to contact Owerri with no success. I sent a telegram but heard weeks later that Bishop Nkemakolam had not received it.

On the very day I had been booked to leave I received a telegram from Owerri. It had taken ten days to arrive. Bishop Nkemakolam apologised that they had been forced to postpone the crusade. Were it not for the Nigerian Embassy's refusal of my visa, I would have been well on my way.

God had not only closed the door, He had nailed it up!

I called in to see Randle Major, an elder at our new home church in Havelock North. When he heard the news he said with relief, "You know Keith, I have felt uneasy about the crusade in Nigeria for some time. I'm glad the Lord has closed the door".

The Lord's guidance in our lives has often been similar to my experience beside the lake in Rotorua. We have had to continually reaffirm our submission to the Lord Jesus. We have reminded ourselves that God has our best interests at heart, and His will is good, acceptable, and perfect.

We dishonour Him by not submitting to His plan. He wants us to trust His wisdom and love. He wants us to abandon our own desires and let Him guide us into what He knows is best.

Many times God has brought me back to the commitment I made to Him in my early Christian life. Marg and I had not long been married, and we decided to attend an Easter Convention at Totara Springs Camp.

One of the main speakers was Fred King from our church. His Sunday afternoon message was powerful.

He read from Exodus 21, where a Hebrew slave was set free after seven years of service. But Fred pointed out that, if the slave loved his master, he could choose to stay his slave forever.

His master would then take him to a doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. The scar on his ear would be a continual witness that he had chosen to serve his master permanently.

Fred called us all to respond to Jesus Christ in the same way. He called us to take the words of the slave in Exodus 21:5, and say to the Lord "I love my Master, I do not want to go free...I will be your servant for life".

He then challenged everyone to face what this commitment would mean. It would affect decisions made at home, at work and right through life. At the end he made an invitation to all who wanted to be servants of the Lord Jesus for life. They were to walk forward and make a public commitment.

I was glad to go forward. Nothing could hold me back. The Lord Jesus had loved me and gladly given His life for me, He deserved nothing less than my wholehearted surrender.

The Lord Himself was the supreme example of a servant whose ear had been pierced with an awl! When the Lord Jesus was baptised, He publicly committed Himself to servanthood. He chose to live under the rule of His Father. This meant a life of rejection and abuse by sinful man, and eventually death on the cross.

Immediately after His public commitment He was led by the Spirit into the desert. Satan subtly tried to turn Jesus from the path of servanthood. He said:

"You shouldn't be hungry! If you are the Son of God you have a right to eat!"

"If you are the Son of God, you should be recognised by your nation as the Messiah. You could do something they want to see. Throw yourself down from the temple!"

When you are miraculously saved by an angel, the people will believe in you. You have a right to be recognised."

"If you are the Son of God you should be ruling the world. Why not take the authority which is yours by right?"

Jesus, however, was not able to be deceived. His rights were always surrendered to His Father. He had come into the world as the Servant, not as the Sovereign. The devil's temptation would not turn Him from that commitment He had made. He had chosen not to be served by others, but to serve, and to give His life for all.

His temptation was not limited to 40 days in the desert. All through His public life Jesus was tempted in the same way. He refused to turn from His commitment even when the apostle Peter tried to prevent Him from going to the cross. "This shall never happen to you" he had said. Jesus responded "Get behind me Satan". He had recognised in Peter's words the voice of the tempter. Then at the cross He faced the final taunts of the devil's human agents when the people called out, "If you are the Christ of God come down from the cross".

In the words of the Psalmist, Jesus could say to His Father: "My ears you have pierced. Here I am...I desire to do Your will O my God" (Psalm 40:6-8).

My own public commitment at Totara Springs Easter Camp was to be tested in a similar way. Since then I have often had to remind myself that my ear has been pierced. All that I have, my gifts and calling from the Lord, are to be surrendered to Him.

Isaac Watts wrote in his famous hymn: "my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride". My richest gain was not a bank balance, or possessions. God had to deal firmly with me for almost a year before I recognised an area I had not given up to Him.

1983 was a difficult year for us. Our home church in Auckland was facing a serious split. We were continually short of money. I was not being invited to preach at crusades or camps. I had a deep sense of failure because of the poor response to my gospel preaching.

This led us to the idea of leaving our itinerant ministry and to serving the Lord by training others.

Also, my time as an intern at Fairhaven Bible Chapel in California had reinforced the importance of equipping God's people in evangelism. What Paul said in Ephesians 4:11 confirmed this. An evangelist was called to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry". We sensed that God could be guiding us again.

I had an opportunity to share a little about our work at a missionary conference at Eden Chapel. After the session Neville Taylor approached me to see if we would help spearhead a second-year practical course for the Bible School students.

We were excited. Given our circumstances, it was the obvious answer - or so we thought.

But God shut the door. The Board decided not to accept the idea, even though it was the Principal who enthusiastically proposed it.

Shortly after, a missionary training organisation, Gospel Literature Outreach, approached us. They asked us to consider moving to Australia to teach at their training school in Tasmania. Both our elders and ourselves believed that God had closed one door and was now opening another.

We decided that I should travel to Australia and meet some of the G.L.O. board members and staff. On the Sunday before I left, Robert Hutchinson, one of our elders at Eilerslie, publicly gave me a verse from the Scriptures. He said: "Go in peace, your journey has the Lord's approval" (Judges 18:6).

I had no doubt that God was guiding. I opened a bank account in Tasmania and took many photographs of the Training Centre to show Marg and the children.

Immediately after my return, we left for Europe to attend the "Amsterdam '83" conference for Itinerant Evangelists. The first message at the conference was given by Dr. Stephen Olford.

As he spoke, the Holy Spirit impressed me with the original call I had. I could not escape it. I was called to preach the gospel. Over the next week I was unable to shake off the deep impression the Spirit had made. I was not to turn aside from my calling. I found myself identifying with Paul who said, "I am compelled to preach, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

I got down on my knees before God and said "Lord, you are my Master. I only want to do your will. I believe you would have me continue preaching the gospel even though it may be difficult and unrewarding at times.

Please shut the door to Tasmania if Tasmania will lead me away from what you want me to do."

Rev. Cho from South Korea was in the middle of his message on faith when God's Spirit focused my mind on what I had to do. Jesus had taught his disciples "**Say to this mountain** be removed and cast into the depths of the sea", and He promised it would be done.

If the Lord Jesus wanted me to continue as an itinerant evangelist, the position at the G.L.O. Training Centre was a barrier. My appointment was assured. How could I pull out at this stage without crossing what my elders felt and what the G.L.O. board expected. I believed that I should give the Lord room to move. If He really did want me to remain in itinerant evangelism, He would have to remove the mountain.

I prayed in a way I have never prayed before, "Lord, I pray to you in Jesus' Name. I say to the mountain of G.L.O. 'be removed' from my path of serving Christ as a gospel preacher".

I knew I had to do more than just pray. I telephoned Ken Harding, one of the Trust Board members. He said they had not yet made a final decision. I told him I would write to the board to ask for freedom to continue itinerant evangelism during those months of the year when I would not be involved in the training schedule at the centre. I suggested I could still give at least six to eight months each year to the school, and even involve the students in some of the crusades.

We arrived in New Zealand and did not have to wait long for a letter from G.L.O. Ken Harding wrote that they had decided I was not the one for the position at their Training Centre.

We had expected the news in answer to our prayers. But when it came we wondered if we had done the right thing. I had made a decision in the hot-house atmosphere of a conference in response to a powerful challenge on the need for evangelists. Now we had to live it out in the real world back home.

We had returned from Amsterdam with a renewed vision to preach the gospel. But we still faced an uncertain future. There was no hint of crusade invitations. All of 1984 was blank.

We had been involved in full-time ministry for almost four years. After an initial busy period of crusades there seemed to be no interest. Over that time there had been very little response to the gospel. I knew God had gifted me as an evangelist, but I could not understand why He had not used me openly.

Before every outreach or crusade meeting I would seek Him. I would sometimes fast and pray, then claim His anointing before preaching. Then once again I would see no outward response. I knew God did work in people's lives at those occasions, but I felt cheated and frustrated. Other evangelists would preach and there would be a good response, so they would get further invitations. We had tried to move out of itinerant evangelism but the Lord clearly stopped us. Why did He not then open doors and give us results?

I did not realise at the time that the Lord was using these events to expose my hidden motives. He wanted to bring me once again to my life-long commitment to Him as my Master.

Satan was tempting me in much the same way as he tempted Christ in the wilderness. "If you are an evangelist, you have a right to see results. You have a right to be recognised in order to fulfil your ministry."

On the 25th September I was driving home in the car, listening to a tape of Mark Porter. He related the story of Catherine Marshall who had been seriously ill for six months with T.B. Medical specialists seemed unable to help. Persistent prayer, confession of sin and others praying over her brought no change. She kept getting worse.

Then one day she read the story of a missionary who had become sick shortly after going to the field. She was bed-ridden for eight years. She cried out to God, but He was silent. Constantly she had prayed for God to make her well so she could serve Him, but the years dragged on.

Catherine then read of the time when the woman became worn out by her pleading and prayed "All right, I give up. If you want me to be an invalid for the rest of my life, I submit to Your will. I want You more than I want

Your help". She recovered within two weeks and resumed her missionary work.

Catherine Marshall was moved to pray her own prayer of relinquishment. She realised that she had been claiming health as her right. She came to God in a new brokenness. She was willing to accept her illness as permanent if that was the Lord's will.

She immediately began to improve until she was completely healed.

I felt condemned. I saw my heart as the Lord truly saw me. I had been claiming results in evangelism as my right. I contrasted my thinking with the Lord's sacrificial love. Jesus Christ deserved my life, my love, my all. But self-interest had dominated me. If Christ was worth living for, He was worth dying for. I was called to die, not physically, but to the self-centred ambition in my heart.

That night at home I got down on my knees and prayed a prayer of relinquishment. "Lord, you are my Master, I am your slave. My ear has been pierced with the awl. I have no right to see results in my work. If I **never** see any conversions at my crusades I will have no complaint. I will work diligently, and, though I will pray for much fruit, I will never again claim it as my right".

I had learned a secret, perhaps **the** secret, of being powerful with God. His guidance and power in our lives is linked closely with a broken and a submissive heart. He says in Isaiah 66:2, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word".

Shortly after, the Lord led us out of Auckland to live in Havelock North. He began to open doors for crusades and was pleased to change many lives for eternity.

Submission to Christ is not giving in to God. It is accepting His right to choose what He knows is best for us. It is not a grudging resignation to the will of God. Rather it's a glad acceptance of the Lord's complete rule in our lives.

Like the slave in Exodus 21, we delight to say "I love my Master...I will be a slave for life".

***He is worth dying for,
therefore He is worth living for!***

*"Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within thine arms,
and strong shall be my hand.*

*My will is not my own
Till Thou hast made it Thine;
If it would reach the monarch's throne
It must its crown resign.
It only stands unbent
Amid the clashing strife,
When on Thy bosom it has leant,
And found in Thee its life."*

George Matherson (1842-1906)

Chapter 3

NOT ASHAMED

PRINCIPLE

God's Word is a living tool in His Hand to direct our thinking. Discovering God's will must first include an obedience to the plain teaching of God's Word.

The Lord can also use Bible principles and promises to confirm a decision.

From the early days of seeking God's guidance we have valued the living quality of God's Word. Though written many years ago by ordinary men, it is God-breathed. What is more, the Divine Author lives in our hearts and brings His Word to life as we seek Him.

Where else were we to turn when uncertain about a decision? During the difficult period leading up to our full-time ministry, waves of impatience and desire would sometimes unsettle me. We were sure of the Lord's direction back into secular work after graduating from Bible School, but our hearts were set on serving God in full-time Christian work. Certain of my calling as an evangelist I felt imprisoned in my job even though I enjoyed it.

I identified with the words of David in Psalm 13:

"How long, O Lord?

Will you forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

How long must I wrestle with my

thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

Look on me and answer, O Lord my God...

I will trust in Your unfailing love."

I would start seeking the Lord's direction once again, saying "Lord, is now the time for us to move?" Then instinctively I would turn to God's Word expecting an answer.

Each time the Lord taught me to be patient. He would bring before me a Bible character who had to wait. Moses, Elisha, Abraham, Joshua, David and even the Lord Jesus had to mark time for many years. They did not miss out on God's purpose for them, and nor would we.

I could not avoid God's clear Word to my heart. I would submit to His direction and happily continue as a Pharmaceutical Rep.

Then one day in March 1978 I had my quiet time early in the morning as usual. I read two passages from the Scriptures. In Psalm 69:13, I was gripped with the thought of David praying for God to answer him at the right time.

*"But I pray to You O Lord
In the time of Your favour;
In Your great love, O God,
Answer me with Your sure salvation."*

I prayed the same words for myself. I asked God to free us to serve Him full time when He knew it was best.

I then turned to the New Testament passage, and read the words:

*"I tell you, now is the time of God's favour,
Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).*

My heart started beating a little faster. I looked out of my study window into the cloudy morning sky.

"Are You telling me that now is the time to move, Lord?" I was excited but cautious. "O Lord, I have waited so long for You to say 'go'. Is this Your Word to me, or am I reading into the passage what I want it to say?"

In earlier years I had taken verses out of context. I fitted them to the circumstances we had been praying about, claiming the Lord's guidance. This method did not work as God would not stand behind His Word when it was used like a horoscope.

I wondered if I was doing the same again, so I left it with the Lord as I went for breakfast, then drove to work. Later that day I drove past our church, and glanced at the text on the notice board: "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation"!

I said "Lord, is this You?"

That evening I checked the message on an answer-phone ministry I was involved with. Weeks earlier I had recorded the words which I now heard being repeated to me over the phone: "Now is the accepted time". I was still not convinced that it was the Lord. I decided not to tell Marg, but pray that, if indeed this was His time, God would open the way for us.

We were attending a missionary conference at our church soon after, and Rowland Forman was the speaker. He brought the main challenge on the Saturday night. He spoke about faith and prayer, and used as his text the words of Isaiah 54:2

"Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes."

The verse seemed to burn deep into my heart. I could only explain it as an inner urge of the Holy Spirit. After the session I was excited to find that Marg had also sensed the same inner conviction of the Spirit. That night we re-read the passage together.

The context of the verse is about Israel being like a barren woman. After waiting a long time, God at last promises that she will have many children. She would have to extend the size of her tent to accommodate the large family she had been promised. But she must do this in faith before any of the children are born.

We needed to exercise the same kind of faith. We had to leave secular employment and extend our evangelistic work, trusting the Lord to give us many spiritual children.

The promise of verse four was powerful, and has been a constant encouragement to us through the years that followed:

“Do not be afraid, you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace, you will not be humiliated.”

We were facing an unknown future. If we move ahead, would we end up ashamed? Would we be humiliated by our church not agreeing to commend us into full-time ministry? Would we be so poorly supported that we would soon have to leave full-time ministry and find another job? Would I receive crusade invitations? Would the Lord bless our work and make us fruitful?

To all of these concerns we applied the promise of Isaiah 54:4, “You will not suffer shame...you will not be humiliated”. God’s written Word became His living, personal Word, applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Many years later the verse is just as relevant to our lives and service.

The passage relates to the restoration of Israel in the Millennium, but the principle of God’s trustworthy character applies to all God’s people at all times. If He calls us to step out in faith, we will not be ashamed or humiliated. This conviction has given us courage to resist the temptation to give up when unexpected difficulties arose.

Marg and I believed that the Lord had used Rowland Forman’s message to show that He was calling us. But what should we do?

If we went to the elders they would question us very thoroughly. The only proof that God was guiding us was a Bible verse coupled with a desire. We knew that this would not be enough to convince them, so we began praying for God to give us a sign.

Perhaps God would prompt someone to send a letter urging us to move into full-time ministry. Maybe a couple of assemblies would invite me to hold crusades. Maybe...

We prayed earnestly and continually for God to give something solid that would confirm His call.

One morning I read the story in John chapter four where the king's official asked Jesus to heal his dying son. The Lord's reply had a message for me. "Unless you see signs" he said, "you will not believe".

I thought about the way we had been waiting for some unmistakable act of God to confirm what He had said to us through His Word. I read on and was impressed by the official's faith. Jesus said to him "Your son will live". On the strength of that promise alone the father went on his way. He spent the night in Cana, then left for Capernaum. On his way he was met by his servants who told him that at 1 pm the boy was healed; That was the very time Jesus had said, "Your son will live".

The man had taken Christ at His word. His faith was tied to the Lord's promise, not a sign. He had not hurried home, but calmly waited until morning before setting out.

We had been waiting in vain. God had spoken to us through His Word. He had called us to extend the borders of our tent, and promised that we would not be ashamed. Now it was our move. We had to trust Him and go.

I did not have a chance to share this with Marg before I left for work, and with the busy schedule through the day it was soon forgotten. That evening I was involved in helping at a crusade in Mangere where John Komene was the evangelist. His message was on the subject of God's Word. He read from Psalm 138:2, "You have exalted above all things Your Name and Your Word". He preached convincing that we can trust God's Word. I sat and thought of my morning devotion. God was certainly speaking to me.

I arrived home to find that Marg had just completed her quiet time. God had also spoken to her in the same way.

She had read in Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous...for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

She was excited. "Look, darling" she pointed, "'Have I not commanded you...?' God has already commanded us to go. We shouldn't be waiting for a sign." We prayed together and thanked God that He had so clearly led us to step out in faith and serve Him.

But what should we do?

We were planning to go to a special missionary weekend at the G.L.O. Training Centre. Colin Tilsley was to be the key-note speaker. He had written and spoken to us several times encouraging us to serve the Lord.

We agreed that we should speak to him about our call. He said, "See your elders". Later that day as we sat in the large marquee for one of the sessions, Fred King was speaking. He said "If you are considering serving the Lord, the first thing to do is see your elders". Colin Tilsley turned and winked at me.

We knew what we had to do, so we spoke to Fred. We then wrote to the elders asking if we could meet to discuss our desire. Little did we know the roadblocks and frustrations which lay ahead. The Lord had graciously prepared us for disappointments by giving us unmistakable guidance through His Word. Many times in the months that followed we found encouragement and stability by accepting God's promise, "You will not suffer shame ... you will not be humiliated."

God's Word has played a major role in every significant direction we have taken. The evidence that God was speaking was not so much the actual words we read. It was more the principle behind them. The Lord's timing in bringing them to our notice also played a major part.

We knew we could easily misuse a Bible passage to deceive ourselves that God was saying what we wanted Him to say. We have been careful to let God take the initiative and draw our attention to an appropriate Scripture.

While working as a pharmaceutical rep, I was often made aware of a biblical principle which applied to my job. When interviewed for the position I made a promise that I would join the company permanently. As I spoke I knew the Lord would one day call us into full-time Christian work, but I had no idea when. It occurred to me at the time that, should I get the job, I would have to honour my word. The Bible principle that we should keep our oath, "even when it hurts," could not be ignored. This was despite my intense longing to serve the Lord in evangelism (Psalm 15:4). I remember saying to the Lord, "Father, You will somehow have to free me from this promise when the time comes to move into the ministry."

For almost four years I was bound by my promise. To break it, even with the excuse of "obeying God", would have been going against God's Word. I knew that the clear moral teaching of the Bible was God's first means of guidance. It took priority over any other leading I thought God was giving.

After the four years, the company re-wrote my job description. This happened when the Lord began opening the way for us to go into full-time ministry. The manager who had hired me left. My new boss wanted me to sell hair-care products to pharmacies while maintaining visits to the doctors. The promise to stay permanently with the company only related to the job I had originally applied for. The change freed me from my oath, allowing me to leave the company when the Lord's time came.

The Bible is the only reliable direction we have been given by God. He may verbally speak to us by His Spirit, but this is rare. Some have claimed "God told me ...", but have later been forced to admit they were wrong. The truth is, we have a very intricate and complex brain. A creative imagination coupled with a sinful nature can easily lead to self-deception. What seems to be God's voice can be nothing more than psychological stimulation. The only way to judge the source of a "word from the Lord" is to see whether it comes true. This does not include a partial fulfilment, nor an outcome that you have manipulated.

God's Word is everything we need in every situation. Its moral standards carry as much weight as they would if God verbally commanded us from heaven. The Bible also contains God's wisdom. It is an instrument in His hand to direct our thinking, and lead us to do His will.

Why did Jesus live where He did? Why did He spend so much time in Galilee? Why did He not live in Jerusalem? Why not at Bethany? Could He not have taken over the platform of John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan River after John was imprisoned by Herod?

In one way Jesus could have lived anywhere in Israel, as long as He was performing the ministry His Father had given Him. There may have been a wise strategy in His decision to live in Galilee. It may also have been more compatible with His role as a servant.

Matthew shows that the Lord was fulfilling God's Word by living in Galilee:

"Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the

people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned"(Matthew 4:13-16).

The Lord Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum because He was conscious of the Scripture which said the Messiah would operate mainly in that area.

The Lord's application of the Scriptures to Himself was unique, as He alone is the focus and fulfilment of them. But we also can take direction from the Lord in decisions such as where we live and what we do, as we read appropriate passages which God providentially brings to bear on our decisions.

This happened when we were praying about spending a year in U.S.A. at the Fairhaven Bible Chapel intern programme. The Lord used His Word to confirm our decision to go. He brought to my notice a verse in Deuteronomy 10:18 "He...loves the alien, giving him food and clothing". The verse did not stand out in any heart-pounding way, but it revealed a truth about God which applied to our plans of going to a foreign country. God cares for the alien! He cared for the visitors to Israel back in the time of Moses. How much more would He care for us who were seeking to serve and follow Him? The verse assured us that we could trust Him to protect and provide for us while away.

God is faithful to His Word. He has put His reputation on the line, and will always fulfil His promises. Those who trust Him and sincerely follow His leading will not suffer shame. Those who obey Him will not be humiliated.

Chapter 4

OLIVE BRANCHES

PRINCIPLE

God has given church elders authority to advise and direct Christians who are in their care. The elder's confirmation of an important decision can indicate the will of God. God also uses other Spirit-filled men and women to challenge or confirm our decisions.

Dick Treasure and Arthur Stedman were at the door. "Come in" Marg welcomed, and we all went into the lounge.

Dick got straight to the reason for their visit. "We had an elders' meeting last night and discussed your letter at length."

"Great," I said, waiting to hear the good news. For five years the Lord had been saying, "Wait", then had unmistakably guided us to move into full-time service. We were sure our letter to the elders would now bring the confirming "Yes".

But Dick's face did not indicate good news. He was concerned, and said, "Keith and Marg, I'm sorry to tell you that the elders don't believe you're ready to enter full-time work".

We looked at each other and back at our dear friend and counsellor.

"We all agree that you are called to evangelism," he went on, "We've no doubt about that. We just feel that the time isn't yet right for you to leave your secular employment and go into ministry."

"But I'm 30 years old, and already busily involved in evangelism. What's more, God has clearly guided us after we've waited for so long."

"Keith," said Arthur, "We're concerned at your lack of stickability. We feel another two years or more would add the maturity and stability needed to go into full-time evangelism."

"Two years!?"

"Yes," replied Dick. "We're asking you to wait at least two years before considering the idea again".

I sighed and sat back in the sofa, confused.

There was nothing more to say. They prayed with us and tried to encourage us, then left.

“O God, O Father,” I prayed, “how can this happen? We don’t understand. You promised that when we extended the borders of our tent, we wouldn’t suffer shame. You promised us that we wouldn’t be humiliated when we stepped out in faith and obeyed Your call.”

Marg also prayed, and we comforted one another.

“It’s because you gave up leading the Sunday School,” she said, “and then after being youth group leader for twelve months you dropped out of that. They don’t have confidence that you’ll stick it out.”

“But I left the Sunday School because they needed a youth leader. I thought I would be wise to get experience working with young people to be better prepared for full-time ministry. And now that we’re going into an itinerant ministry there’s no point continuing as leader of the young people”.

“I know, but they don’t see it that way!” Marg reminded me.

“Two years! How can I go back to selling for another two years! I’m all psychologically prepared to leave. I have absolutely no desire to continue in my job.”

Marg gave me a cuddle and encouraged me to trust the Lord.

Sleep did not come easily as I lay face up in bed that night. I had seen other young people go against their elders, or criticise them behind their backs. We had determined not to follow their bad example. Yet here, I reasoned, the elders were clearly wrong.

We were convinced God was leading us. Should we go against their direction? My understanding of the Bible’s teaching on church life would not let me. That would be to step outside the clear will of God as revealed in His Word. Either Marg and I had misunderstood God’s leading, or the Lord would have to change the elders’ minds.

The next morning I opened the Bible to the passage set for my reading schedule. "Jesus said to His disciples, 'The Passover is two days away and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.' Then the chief priests and the elders of the people ... plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill Him. 'But not during the feast' they said, 'or there will be a riot among the people' " (Matthew 26:2-5).

I ran into the bedroom. "Marg," I exclaimed, "God has shown me something incredible". She looked at the verses as I read them to her. "Jesus said that He would be killed in two days, but the elders of Israel said, 'not during the feast' ".

"Yes", Marg said, waiting for me to amplify.

"God overruled the chief priests and elders, and Jesus was crucified during the Passover as He had said," I exclaimed, looking at her with wide eyes. "If God overruled the ungodly elders of Israel to fulfil His purpose, He can surely overrule our godly elders!"

That Scripture brought peace, and guarded us against any resentment that could so easily have seeped in. God was in control of our elders. He would not allow them to close a door He wanted open.

We decided to make the Lord our refuge, and leave the problem for Him to work out. We prayed that God would show the elders that the time was right, and that we were being called by the Holy Spirit.

During the Christmas break I had the responsibility of speaking at a Family Camp north of Auckland. Each day we had the joy of seeing different ones respond in faith and repentance to the gospel message. We agreed that God was confirming our call to evangelism.

We had talked together about the elders and their decision before we went to camp. And we had prayed the words of Moses in Psalm 9:16-17 "May your deeds

be shown to your servants ... may the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us, yes, establish the work of our hands."

God had heard us and shown His favour by making the camp so fruitful. We were encouraged, yet we knew this would not be enough to change the elders' minds.

Then the Lord brought to mind the fact that our letter to the elders had not formally asked for commendation. We had only asked to meet with them and share the events which led us to believe that God was calling us to the ministry. We still had not been given that opportunity.

After returning from holidays we were more certain of our call, and the need to share it with the elders. Arthur agreed and promised to arrange a meeting. Dick also said that, after they had told us to wait, he had given it more thought and felt that the elders may have decided too quickly. He was glad we had asked for a meeting.

On February 7th 1979 we shared with them our experience of the Lord's direction. We said that we believed God had led us to go into full-time Christian work. After a lot of questioning and comments, they said they would inform the assembly and defer their decision until a future meeting.

At the next elders meeting there was no mention of our commendation.

The following month, April, they discussed the issue but were divided. They made no decision.

By this time the whole church had become polarised. Some felt very strongly that we should be commended, and others were not at all sure. We admired those who were not just content to express an opinion, but really sought the Lord for guidance. It was a difficult time for us. We felt the church was examining our every word and action as they tried to make up their minds.

During those months of waiting we grew even stronger in our conviction. We realised that a time would come when, looking back, we would be able to say, "If it wasn't for God we would never have moved into the ministry". This spurred us on. God was the God of the impossible. We agreed not to manipulate things, or lobby support. It was strictly hands off! If we abandon ourselves to God, He will not abandon us. If He wanted us serving Him, He would have to do it. We experienced a supernatural peace.

During this time I was reading the book of Acts. I saw that the Holy Spirit was the Initiator behind every forward move. He was the Guide for each individual involved in the growth of the early church. If God's Spirit was leading us, He would have to lead the elders and church in the same way. He would cause them to agree with us. We were powerless to do anything except pray.

Fred encouraged us by saying that in his opinion we were not immature. He said that we should not let any criticism discourage us. He pointed out Romans 14:4 "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

He said, "Did you know that one or two well-known evangelists in New Zealand caused similar turmoil in their churches when they first asked for commendation?"

Two days later Dick rang. He said he had come to an unmistakable conviction that God had called us. Marg and I saw God at work in this. We rejoiced to see God proving Himself a faithful and loving Father.

God delights in bringing us to a point of death where our helplessness stares us in the face. Only then is He the God of resurrection! It is His way! The death of a vision, the end of human hope, the extinguishing of the

possibility of success are followed by the evidence of God's hand.

God tests those He entrusts with the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:4). Joseph, David, Moses and others of God's servants were tested by "hope deferred". We were also being put to the test.

On June 7th, Arthur phoned. He said that, in a meeting the previous night, the elders had all agreed to commend us. The next day I handed in a letter of resignation to the pharmaceutical company.

The elders' confirmation was the most important evidence of God's guidance. They are human, with normal fears and differing temperaments. Yet despite their different outlooks, God brought them to a firm belief that His Spirit was saying to the church, "Set apart for Me Keith and Marg for the work to which I have called them" (see Acts 13:2). God always works through those He has placed in authority.

When God raised up workers to rebuild the temple after Israel's exile, He chose two men as leaders. Zerubbabel, from the royal line of David, and Jeshua the High Priest were appointed to take responsibility over the project. In Zechariah they are pictured as two olive branches, and are referred to as "the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth" (Zechariah 4:12,14).

The leaders God used in building His temple were Spirit-filled men. His promise to the people at that time was, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty' ".

Seemingly impossible tasks can be accomplished by God's Spirit. The way God does it is through anointed leaders - olive branches who are channels for His Spirit.

In His building of the Church today, the Lord continues to work through Spirit-filled leaders and counselors.

When we moved from Auckland to Havelock North, we met with our new elders. We immediately put ourselves under their guidance and authority. They adopted us, showing interest and care. Their support since then has greatly influenced our effectiveness in Christian work, and our security through difficult times.

One elder in particular took a special interest in us and our work. He was a great help and encouragement. Jim Smith caught a vision of God's call on our lives. He was an example of a Spirit-filled elder, not seeking his own interests, but those of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whenever I was to leave for an outreach, Jim would be there. He would pray with me and press a couple of petrol vouchers into my hand. He and his wife Esme cared for us. We could share our deepest needs and unload our heaviest burdens. He taught us faith. He modelled love. He inspired worship. He showed us the importance of giving Christ His rightful place as Lord in our lives.

As "This Is Life Ministries" began to struggle through its infancy into an established outreach organisation, Jim was the most enthusiastic, undaunted, and prayerful encourager on the Trust Board.

The principle of submission to elders is clearly taught in God's Word. Paul appointed elders to oversee the churches he had established. He reminded one such group of their responsibility for those under their care: "Keep watch over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28).

All Christians are instructed to live under their authority: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden" (Hebrews 13:17).

Elders have authority delegated to them from the Lord Himself. They are not to abuse their position of trust, but lead by example. Those under them must gladly and willingly respect their direction. The apostle Peter said: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...not lording it over those entrusted to you...young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (1 Peter 5:2-5).

At Havelock North we came to appreciate the immense value of serving God under the care of godly, Spirit-filled elders. Jim realised that the assembly needed to stand behind our work of evangelism. We could not get up and say, "Please support us in what we are trying to do". Yet we desperately needed the encouragement and fellowship of the body of Christ. Jim stirred the whole fellowship to love and good works.

Once I was leading a team outreach around Northland. He became deeply concerned that we had gone without the assembly showing any solidarity with us. He rallied the assembly to bake cakes and donate petrol vouchers, then flew to Whangarei to encourage us.

The team of young people could not believe their eyes! An elder travelling such a long way with two suitcases stuffed with cakes and \$500 worth of petrol vouchers. The team members saw something rare and beautiful. The impact of his life and ministry cannot be calculated.

Over many years, the Lord has impressed us with the vital role of the olive branches. They have been a brake on me when I was too hasty. They have encouraged me when I was tempted to give up. They have been a support in difficult times. We can only repay our debt to them by following their example in the way we now care for others.

Chapter 5

A VOICE BEHIND

PRINCIPLE

Often God will not guide in any specific way, but expects us to move ahead in dependence on Him. As we do so, He confirms His will through circumstances, wise advice, inner conviction, and the presence or absence of peace.

The day finally came for us to leave for Havelock North. Alan Whitfield arrived in his truck, and we helped load all our belongings.

We had lived fourteen years in Auckland. Now we were heading south to live in a little town on the sunny east coast of the North Island.

As Alan drove off, we looked up at the house we had built when we were just married. It was not ours any more. There was no turning back now! We said goodbye to our neighbours and went to get into our cars.

"I'll follow you, love," Marg said. "I don't know the way".

"But you should learn the way," I replied. "There may be a time when you will have to drive it by yourself. You go first and I'll come behind".

"O.K., but you'll have to stay close to make sure I don't go wrong!"

She moved off and I drove a comfortable distance behind her. For two hours she led the way without making any mistakes. Driving in front forced her to figure out the right route. Knowing I was following gave her confidence. Only once, when passing through Matamata, did she turn the wrong way. Immediately I signalled to her, flashing my lights and sounding my horn. She turned back and took the correct road.

As we drove out of Matamata I thought of the similar way God deals with us. He also gives us the opportunity of using our own initiative. He is not always in front, showing us the path to take. He is behind, leaving us with the dignity of choosing what we believe to be His will.

Many of life's choices are made with little or no direct guidance from God. His silence shows we are taking the right turn. When we move out of His will He uses various means to attract our attention and turn us around.

Driving down the highway I thought of a verse: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it' " (Isaiah 30:21). Many times Marg and I have prayerfully made decisions with no evidence of God's special guidance. We have had His confirming voice behind as we have moved ahead in faith.

Even the major decision to move to Havelock North was not linked to any clear direction from the Lord. Our church had been going through prolonged difficulties, and friends advised us to shift from Auckland. We prayed for guidance but no direct leading came.

We wondered what God wanted us to do. Both alternatives had advantages. Either way we could satisfy our basic desire to please God and bring Him glory. Do we stay and try to help the assembly rebuild, or do we go? Our home church had commended and supported us, so we could not simply leave.

We were responsible for Steve Reardon, a young intern working with us. We were also planning a training programme where other young people would work in the assembly. "You can't train or involve a team in a church that's divided," one trusted counsellor told me. As problems in the fellowship showed no signs of healing, it became clear we had to move. But though we waited on the Lord, there was still no divine guidance.

The next year we did not have a trainee intern, nor did I have any crusades planned. Neville Taylor approached us to see if I would travel New Zealand for six months, promoting the Assembly Bible School. This seemed an open door, giving time to sort out the right path to take. We are always amazed at the way the Lord orders our way.

As I went from place to place encouraging young people to attend Bible School, I looked for an assembly suitable for us. Once I was staying with Jan and Graeme Clark in Havelock North. They told us how their assembly was geared for growth. It was a warm and strong assembly with a new, younger eldership. It fitted the type of church we were looking for.

We prayed for guidance, but once again there was no direction from the Lord. We decided to start moving and allow God either to stop us or to confirm the move.

The door opened wide. The elders at Havelock North were very warm and positive about our move. The house in Auckland sold and we found an ideal section of land in Havelock North. Graeme Clark also offered to build us a new house for a very reasonable price.

Nothing stood in the way of our moving. Yet God had not given any special indication that we were doing His will. I was reflecting on this one morning as I read the Bible. The Lord confirmed our move with the words of Jesus in John 10:3, "the Watchman opens the gate for him ... ". Although this refers to the Father opening the gate for Jesus, the Shepherd, it still applied to us. It was an unchanging principle of God's ways. He is the One who opens the doors!

The Gatekeeper had every opportunity to intervene and prevent us from moving south. He could have given us a continuing uneasiness. He could have used people, circumstances, disagreement between Marg and me, or our elders to stop us. But He didn't. The door had opened as we prayerfully moved in the direction we believed was right. Without a doubt God had opened the door, and we have never questioned it since.

In contrast, another time we planned to move was thwarted by the Lord. He closed the door.

By 1991 "This Is Life" had grown into a small, busy organisation with a number of full-time and volunteer staff. We were involved in a variety of outreach activities. While visiting Wellington Malcolm Dodge approached me. He was a member of the "Silverstream Park Christian Trust". They had purchased an old hospital on a hill in Upper Hutt, and had a vision of transforming it into a camp and conference complex.

Malcolm showed me over the grounds and said, "If 'This Is Life Ministries' moved to Silverstream, we would give you the old nurses' home rent-free. You could be based here, helping in the Park outreach, and be more central to the whole country."

It seemed an opportunity of a lifetime. We could save thousands of dollars rent each year, and be in a major city on a more spacious property. Team members would live in a hostel on the property. It seemed a wonderful answer to prayer.

But I knew that some big barriers would have to be removed if the Lord opened the way. First there was Marg and our girls who were settled and very happy in Havelock North. Then there were staff to consider. Murray and Sharon Weir in particular would be greatly affected by such a big change. The "This Is Life" Trust Board and our own elders were also potential barriers. They would need to be convinced of the Lord's hand in the move.

I drove home, quite expecting Marg to squelch the idea. But she was quite happy to move, despite her concerns about leaving friends and home behind. Our daughters, Rebecca and Kim, though less positive, were open to going.

The staff would have to be in full agreement, which seemed unlikely. I first shared the idea with Shona. She was keen! Murray and Sharon, though cautious, were quite positive. The Lord seemed to be removing the barriers.

The Trust Board also agreed to the wisdom and advantages of setting up in Wellington. And our elders, though disappointed with the news of our plans, said they would be with us should it happen.

In a very short time God had thrown open the door ... or so we thought!

Though we had no clear word from the Lord, we prayerfully began moving in the direction of relocating. The Trust Board authorised me to write and accept the kind offer of the Silverstream Park Christian Trust. But we laid out certain conditions as safeguards.

While we all waited for their reply, God swung the door back in front of us. It began with an increasing unease of spirit. The Holy Spirit was disturbing me, taking away any peace whenever I thought about the move. At first I did not want to share my concern with others. But one day as I talked with Murray, it became clear that he also was having second thoughts. When I shared my own uneasiness he showed open relief. "Sharon and I are not happy about the move any more," he said "and we were worried that our change of heart would go against everyone else!"

To my amazement the other staff and the Trust Board felt the same. God was obviously saying, "Wrong way". Over the following weeks we found out that the situation at Silverstream Park had changed. There was now no advantage in moving there. We had started in a direction which we believed was God's will, but we were to hear His voice behind us saying, "No!"

The apostle Paul and his team had a similar experience when travelling through Galatia. In Acts 16:6-10 the evangelistic team was moving from town to town, preaching the gospel and encouraging believers. They came to the border region of Asia where large cities gave great opportunities to spread the gospel.

They started heading into Asia but they “were kept by the Holy Spirit” from preaching there. We have no way of telling how the Holy Spirit restricted their movements. He could have used a strong sense of unease in all their hearts. He may have put circumstances in the way, until they changed their minds and thought of going into another district. Whatever means He used, God's hand was clear to all the team. They could confidently say, “It is not God's will for us to go into Asia at this time”.

After being turned aside from Asia, the missionaries decided to move into the northern region of Bithynia. But once again the Spirit of God “would not allow them” (Acts 16:7).

They were left with one alternative, Troas. The night they arrived in Troas the Lord gave Paul a vision. It was of a man from across the Aegean Sea in Macedonia. He called him to go and help in the work of the Lord there. They “concluded that God had called them” to preach the gospel to the Macedonians.

The Lord had been guiding them. Now at last they knew His divine purpose in the confusing events leading up to the vision in Troas.

The apostle Paul did not sit and wait for God to reveal where He wanted the team to go. He knew that he could only determine the mind of the Lord as he moved. With the whole team's agreement he decided to go into Asia. They packed their gear and started out. Over previous weeks and months there had been many times where the Lord had not intervened in their decisions.

Throughout the whole region of Galatia they had chosen where to go, and the Lord had not stopped them. But this time His voice was behind them saying “This is not the way”.

“This Is Life Ministries” grew out of an event similar to the apostle’s experience in Acts 16. I had been involved in a Christmas outreach team in Mexico with Operation Mobilisation. There I saw first hand the value of this kind of team ministry. Returning to New Zealand I had a strong conviction to start the same type of outreaches.

Steve Reardon and I started praying for the Lord to guide us. I had the idea of pulling together a team to go to the Islands of Samoa. I wrote to Ene Sagala, a pastor in an assembly there, and his response was very positive. We started making plans.

We chose to leave for Samoa in early December, and use the build up to Christmas as a way to present the gospel. It was early in the year, and we began notifying churches and youth groups of our plans. At the well attended “Auckland Missionary Camp”, we made a special announcement. We encouraged young people to join the outreach.

A date was set for all interested people to meet at the Ellerslie Bible Chapel. Steve and I went early and prepared the room for the small meeting. Thirty minutes after the advertised time no-one had turned up. Steve suggested we pray. So we both got on our knees and began calling out to the Lord to raise up a team.

The next day I received a phone call from Josh Philips. He said that he and his friend Ron were interested in the outreach to Samoa. Later the same week Dorothy Rae said she wanted to join us. Others made themselves known to us over the following weeks until we had a team of eight.

God had certainly answered prayer, and we were confident that we were moving with the Lord.

We had special team meetings for preparation and prayer. We learned a number of Samoan phrases. Our tickets were purchased. Final details of the outreach were being organised when we received a letter from Ene. He had been diagnosed as having throat cancer, and had to fly immediately to New Zealand for surgery. There was no way we could have an outreach there without Ene's leadership and translation.

We were stunned! What were we to do? As I had my daily devotions, I read of King Jehosophat facing an impossible situation with his small army. He said "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chronicles 20:12). I recorded my prayer in my quiet-time dairy:

"O God and Father,

Be pleased, I pray, to turn this into a great victory where people will see that you are our God. May we stand still and see You work for us and bring a victory. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.

Should we go to Fiji? Should we go to Kerikeri? Should we go to Flaxmere? Should we go to Blenheim? Should we go elsewhere? Or should we continue to plan to go to Samoa?

O God and Father, in Jesus' Name I ask for Your gracious and clear intervention. Our eyes are upon You O Lord."

That evening Marg and I read in our daily reading from the "Daily Bread" a devotion entitled "God's Kind Will". It included the words, "We never need be afraid of yielding to God's will. Not only is it our duty, it is also a privilege that brings us the greatest good. Child of God, trust your Heavenly Father and do what you know is right. You will find that even when the way is difficult, His will is always kind."

*“Father, keep me trusting, trusting,
Yielding gladly to Thy will.
Though ten thousand foes surround me,
Let me trust Thee, and be still.”*

I decided to stay up and pray through part of the night until I felt a release. While seeking the Lord I began to think of taking the team to Mexico for the Operation Mobilisation Christmas outreach. “Why not?” I thought, “The extra cost may be a problem, but if the Lord wants us there He will provide all our needs.”

Like Paul and his team, we started moving in this new direction. But it was less than two weeks until the time our team had arranged for vacations from their jobs. We started thinking of flying to San Francisco. There we could join the small team going from Fairhaven Bible Chapel. I phoned the team leader at Fairhaven, who was happy for us to join them. He said he could borrow an extra van to take us. The only problem was money. Most team members did not have enough to pay the extra thousand dollars.

Time was critical. We had to know within a few days if we were going to Mexico. We prayed for the Lord to provide the finance, but no team members saw an answer. It seemed obvious after a few days that the door was not opening.

Steve and I discussed going somewhere in New Zealand and holding a two-week outreach. But it would not work. December is far too busy, and church activities are winding down in preparation for the summer break. Like the apostle Paul we had moved in two different directions. The Lord had used circumstances outside our control to prevent us from going ahead.

Then the Lord put it into our minds to move from town to town around New Zealand. We could reach out in a

different area each day and not be a burden to the Christians. I immediately phoned people in towns throughout the North Island and soon had a full schedule of outreach meetings.

God went before us and we saw His hand move in a wonderful way at every location. It became obvious to everyone on the team that this kind of outreach should be held annually. Over the following years, the December team grew and developed. It led to our starting other similar outreaches. The undeniable blessing that has flowed from the cancellation of the Samoa outreach cannot be calculated.

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left your ears will hear a voice behind you saying 'This is the way, walk in it.' ”

Chapter 6

MOUNTAIN MOVING

PRINCIPLE

Circumstances and people, like mountains, can sometimes stand in the way of our accomplishing God's will.

Faith in God can result in the removal of these obstacles, giving assurance that the decision is in the will of the Lord.

God raised up the prophet Zechariah to motivate the Jews into re-building the temple at Jerusalem. They had spent 70 years exiled in Babylon. Then God's Spirit led Zerubbabel and a remnant of the people to return to their homeland and be re-established as a nation.

With enthusiasm the small group had crossed enemy territory and begun work on the temple. They laid the foundations with great celebration. Then opposition broke out against them. Their enemies produced an edict they had obtained from the emperor, forbidding them from continuing with the work. To ignore the king's command would be suicide. For fifteen years their tools lay idle, and the foundations grew weeds.

But God had called them to rebuild, so Zechariah was sent to stir them into action again. The people knew that God had called them to this important task, but there was one big problem. A mountain stood in the way! In their eyes, the king's edict was an insurmountable obstacle to doing God's will. There was no way around it. They were too small to oppose the might of the neighbouring Persian superpower.

Realising God had called them to obey, they made the excuse, "The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be rebuilt" (Haggai 1:2). They wanted to do God's will. But they would wait for the Lord to make it possible before they would start.

God's word through Zechariah came with accuracy and power..."This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit' says the Lord Almighty. 'What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground' " (Zechariah 4:6-7).

The size of the mountain did not concern God. He is the Lord Almighty! Israel's lack of power would not

hinder God from accomplishing His purpose. His work does not depend on human strength. Zerubbabel had to step out in faith and start rebuilding. To do God's will was all the Lord expected of the Israelites. His Spirit would remove every obstacle ("By My Spirit...O mighty mountain...you will become level ground").

The nation's response to God's message was immediate. They picked up their tools with renewed faith and commitment.

As soon as they started work, the neighbouring enemies reported their rebellion to the emperor. But God's Spirit frustrated their designs. He did not destroy the Persian army. He removed the mountain by simply causing the king to look into the royal archives. There he found an edict from a previous king, giving the Jews permission to rebuild. He therefore issued a new decree. This protected the Jews and gave them all the resources needed for the completion of the temple!

Many times when we have set out to do God's will, there have been mountains that blocked the way. We have come to expect it. Some mountains God removed in answer to prayer, showing that His hand was involved in leading us. Other times obstacles have remained, forcing us to change our direction.

We had been commended to full-time ministry for just a short time. I discussed with Marg my concern at our lack of practical training. We were dealing with people and church problems that called for more than we felt capable of giving. My parents had been home on furlough from Brazil. Dad mentioned a leadership training course run by Bill Mac Donald and Jean Gibson at the Fairhaven Bible Chapel in California. I wrote and received the prospectus and application forms.

We prayed.

Not long afterwards we were browsing in a Christian bookshop when Neville Taylor walked in.

He had recently returned from a six month sabbatical in Canada. He saw me, and after a warm greeting said "Keith, there is a place in America you really should go to."

"Don't tell me," I replied. "It's the intern training course at Fairhaven Bible Chapel. Am I right?"

"Yes," Mr. Taylor continued. "Someone in Canada was so insistent that I see it for myself, he paid for my air fare down and back. Keith, the training Bill and Jean give is just what you need. You must go."

If we had not been praying, the impact of Mr. Taylor's words would not have been so powerful. Marg and I were sure the Lord was guiding, especially with the deep sense of peace we shared after praying more.

Our calendar was free for the year beginning September 1980, and we started planning to go to the course.

We saw three obstacles in the way. First we expected a negative reaction from our elders. Only a few months had passed since they commended us to the Lord's work. Now we were coming back with a request to spend a year overseas for further training. The difficulties they had worked through in agreeing to our commendation were still fresh in their minds. In their position I would probably have the same reservations I expected them to have. Still, we felt sure the Lord was leading us, so there was only one thing to do - go and see them.

I first spoke with Dick, who surprised me by being open to the idea. We then shared with the rest of the elders. We were delighted when they agreed the training course would be a good step. Their only condition was that we return to continue serving the Lord in New Zealand. We praised God for removing the first mountain.

The largest obstacle that blocked our way was the need for a student entry visa into U.S.A. Our fears were confirmed when we approached the American Consulate. We had to show that we had sufficient funds to keep us for the year. We had no money at all, and our church was not in a position to help. We trusted the Lord for all our financial needs, but that would not impress the consulate officials. We also found that the U.S. Government did not approve Fairhaven's course for international students. We prayed!

Our elders then told us that the church would not support us financially while we were in America. They had a policy of only supporting people who were actually doing Christian work. Because we were going for training we did not qualify. Instead of being removed, the mountain was growing bigger! Still we prayed.

I thank God for the partner He has given me. Marg is always an inspiration when we have to make decisions requiring faith. She encouraged me to trust the Lord: "He will get us a visa if He wants us to go".

We filled out the visa applications and sent them in with the documents and photos. We were encouraged by verses such as Matthew 21:21, when Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt...you can say to this mountain 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Weeks went past with no word from the consulate. Weeks became months, and our departure date was getting close. I was in the city one day, and called at the consulate to find out what the delay was. The young lady at the counter went away for a long time and returned with our passports. She told me that after searching the place she had not found our visa applications and other documents.

She was most apologetic, and asked us to complete another form and supply photos again. We quickly returned these to her and continued to pray.

About three weeks before we were due to fly out, Marg received a phone call from the consulate. It was on a Sunday afternoon, which seemed quite unusual to us. I was out, and the lady asked Marg a number of questions about the purpose of our stay in America. She also asked how we were going to support ourselves there, and if we planned to return permanently to New Zealand. She apologised once again for the consulate losing our documents, and said we would be given a visa!

We praised God. The mountain had seemed formidable! By miraculously removing it, God had confirmed to us His will. We left for America confident that the divine hand which had opened the way would also provide our needs there. If our church could not support us, the Lord would no doubt use others. He did!

The third obstacle to attending Fairhaven was the airfare. We simply trusted God to provide. People knew we were planning to go. So we trusted God to put our need on their hearts and move them to give.

The mountain loomed higher when we found that we needed the airline tickets before we could get entry visas into America. We had nothing saved towards the fares. Though we prayed earnestly, very little came in.

The time came for us to go to our travel agent and book the flights. We went to a Christian firm and made all the arrangements. The director of the company, George Bremner, did not usually see clients who came in off the street. On this occasion, after we had talked about our arrangements with the consultant, George asked us into his office. He said, "Your fares come to \$4,500. We have opened a charitable trust here. If you wish, I can purchase the tickets for you, then you can pay us when you are able."

George had no idea of our predicament, and we had given no hint of it. God had effectively removed the mountain.

The money finally came in, two days before we were to fly out!

God allows mountains to stand in our way so often that we now expect them as the norm. When people decide to come on teams with us, or join us in evangelism, I often advise them to expect difficulties. They can then see God's hand in the way He answers prayer and clears the way.

Once, Marg and I had an important decision to make which had no obstacles blocking the way. It made us feel insecure, as we did not need God's help.

Marg's parents had died and left her some money in their estate. We used some, and the rest was set aside for something special.

Soon after, I received an invitation to the "Amsterdam '83" conference for itinerant evangelists. It was organised by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Organisation. I was very keen to attend, so we started praying about going. Marg had close relatives in England. She was excited at the thought of seeing them while I was in Amsterdam. Then we received a letter from my parents in Brazil. They asked if we could make it to San Diego for a family reunion. Two of my sisters had settled in North America. This made the United States a more convenient venue than New Zealand. It worked out that we could fit all three events into one trip.

We had good reasons to go. We both felt at peace. Nothing blocked the way. We did not need God to supply our fares. But being able to go ahead with our plans without depending on God made us feel a little uneasy. It brought into focus the importance of living our Christian lives in dependence on God.

One reason the Lord does not reveal His will in advance is to keep us looking to Him. He often allows obstacles to remind us of our dependence. He knows the peril of independence. It is at the root of all sin, and is one of the strongest drives of our sinful nature.

I found myself thanking God for the mountains. They kept us close to the Lord and more reliant on Him. Mountains help us live by faith. When there are no mountains we can begin living in disregard of the Lord almost without knowing it.

We decided to go to the Travel Agent and check the air fares. We parked the car.

"How much do we have set aside from the estate?" I asked.

"\$7,200," Marg replied.

"I hope that will be enough," I said.

"Let's pray," Marg suggested.

Holding hands we prayed: "Dear Lord, just because we have the means to go on this trip is not enough. We do not want to step out of Your will. Please show us in some way that we are moving with You in this decision."

David Goulstone sat across the desk and rattled away at his computer keyboard, looking up at the screen from time to time. He had managed to find a surprisingly cheap fare with the children at half the bargain price! "The fares come to \$7,200" he said.

We looked at each other in grateful surprise. The fare was exactly the amount we had set aside. God's hand had been involved, and we went home happy and with a spring in our steps.

Relying upon God brings a deep peace and security. Mountains are often His means to force our complete dependence upon Him. They are put there so we can prove His faithfulness and power in removing them.

Chapter 1

HIGH STAKES NO RISK

PRINCIPLE

*When God guides, He provides.
Doing God's will can be daunting when
your reputation and security are at stake.
God is equal to the risk, and faith in Him
proves to be greater security than
leaning on our own limited
understanding.*

Discerning God's will must lead to doing it. If the Lord guides us, then we must obey. Jonah is a biblical example of a disobedient servant. He knew God's will but would not do it.

Choosing to do God's will can seem risky at times. Much is at stake. For Jonah it was his reputation. He was told to warn Nineveh that she would be destroyed by God as punishment for her sins. But he knew God was merciful, and was likely to forgive if the city repented. Jonah's reputation as a prophet was on the line. He would lose face if the judgment failed to happen. He reckoned that, as God is merciful, the stakes were too high. He ran in the opposite direction, only to have the Lord pursue him and bring him back.

Jonah's greatest fear was realised. After preaching God's message to the people of Nineveh, he sat down and sulked. The whole city had repented, and God had turned away from His plan to destroy them.

Jonah complained to God: "This is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God...a God who relents from sending calamity. Now O lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:2-3). Jonah could not face the thought of returning home disgraced by an unfulfilled prophecy. His whole career was in jeopardy.

Trusting God is necessary if we are to obey Him. The stakes are high. But when God guides, He provides. He will protect, feed, clothe, and vindicate those who trust Him. His faithfulness, mercy, and grace toward us carry on day after day.

Many times we do not deserve the Lord's protection. Times when we have made foolish decisions. Yet the Lord always shows grace rather than judgment. We will praise Him for eternity because of His grace and faithfulness to undeserving, failing people who want to be His servants.

David had courage to face Goliath because of the victories God had given him over the lion and the bear. We also had proved God's faithfulness in small ways before facing our giants. God had provided money to cover the fees at Bible School after unexpected car expenses left us short. This became a handle to hold onto when we moved into full-time ministry. If God provided for us through Bible School, He would continue to do so as we followed Him.

When I left secular work, Hoechst N.Z. allowed me to purchase my company car at an extremely good price. They also paid me the full superannuation which is normally given to those who stay with the company for ten years. With the money we had saved, and the sale of Marg's little Morris Minor, we had just enough to buy the car. When I drove home after my last day at work, we thanked the Lord for His goodness. We had a reliable vehicle...and ten cents in the bank!

The first bill we faced was insurance for the car, about \$400. It was due immediately. We had no one to go to except the Lord. The next day we received two cheques in the mail to cover the insurance. From that day we have continually proved God's faithfulness. For many years we received a very small regular gift from our church due to the itinerant nature of my work. Most of our support came from God's people everywhere.

Sometimes we have had to sell articles at the auction, or organise a last-minute garage sale to pay our bills. But there has always been food on the table. The Lord has never let us down.

David says the same when he says, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).

Late January 1981 found us midway through our year at the Fairhaven intern training programme. Over Christmas I had taken a team of young people to Mexico on an O.M. crusade. The Lord had provided us with funds and transport in answer to prayer. He had shown His faithfulness in so many ways. So I decided to speak on "Trusting God To Be Faithful" at the intern morning devotions.

I shared how God had provided our air fares from New Zealand. Since arriving in the States we had proved the Lord every day. "You need never doubt God's faithfulness," I said. "He cannot deny Himself. You can trust Him completely".

The other interns and staff were not the only ones who heard my words that morning. The Lord heard, and put me to the test.

The following weekend we were due to pay the rent. Fairhaven had rented the house on our behalf, and let it to us at a subsidised rate. We owed \$250 that Sunday, but as the office was not open on the weekend, we planned to pay it on Friday.

Though we had no money, we knew that God would not let us down. So we prayed and left it with the Lord. On Wednesday we didn't even have enough money to buy a loaf of bread. We prayed as a family asking God to "give us this day our daily bread". That evening we had the weekly home group in our lounge. We half expected one of the believers to slip a small gift into our hands. After the last one left, we looked at each other. How would we provide breakfast and lunches for our girls the following day? I went into the kitchen to clean up, and found that someone had left a dollar on the fridge! Only a little miracle, but to a family on its knees it was wonderful!

When Friday came we only had \$100 towards the rent. We decided to wait until Monday, trusting that the

Lord would provide over the weekend. Nothing came in and on Monday there was no mail for us.

One of the office staff spoke to me on Tuesday morning: "Your rent is overdue. Can you please fix it up today?"

I didn't know what to do. Only a week before I had spoken so confidently on God's faithfulness. How could I now go to the office and explain that God has not provided? Jack Davies, the administrator-pastor, also mentioned our need to pay the rent. I felt let down by God and embarrassed. I replied, "I'm sorry, Jack, I'll get it to you."

That afternoon Marg and I got down on our knees in earnest. We thought of the special verse God had given us before we left New Zealand: "He loves the alien (visitor from a foreign country), giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18).

Then a thought came to us as we talked together. God had been unfaithful. He had not provided in time for us to pay our rent.

"Impossible," I said. "God can never be unfaithful. He cannot change His very nature. Either we have misunderstood Him, or in some way He will yet prove His faithfulness."

We both prayed with renewed faith:

"O God and Father in heaven, we have proven Your faithfulness so many times, yet in this instance You seem to have let us down. We believe You are faithful. So we pray that You will provide the rest of the rent in a way that will show us You have not let us down."

This seems to be an impossible request to ask of You, Lord. We are now a few days past the date for the rent. But we trust You to show that You have been faithful all along. We thank and praise You, in Jesus' Name, Amen."

Wednesday's mail had nothing. After lunch we decided I had better go and see Jack Davies. I walked into his office and sat down.

"Yes, Keith," he said with his warm smile. "How can I help you?"

"Do you remember my devotion last week about the faithfulness of God?" I started.

Jack nodded.

"Well, I don't understand. For the very first time it seems as if God has let us down. We do not have enough to pay our rent. We have \$100, and have been praying for the Lord to provide the balance, but at this stage He has not."

"You are short by \$150, is that correct?" Jack asked.

"Yes."

"Look, I'm sorry, but I have forgotten to tell you that an anonymous gift of \$150 earmarked for you was placed in the offering on Sunday."

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "How is that for the Lord's faithfulness? If I had come to you first thing on Monday morning, I could have settled the rent then. The money was there but I did not know about it. God is amazing!"

When Marg and I were considering full-time ministry, we were concerned about the effect on our children. It was we who had been called to serve the Lord, and had freely counted the cost. But our children had had no choice.

We had heard of missionaries and full-time workers whose children had been disadvantaged by their parents' work and lack of funds. We decided to trust God's faithfulness in providing for our girls.

God has heard and answered that prayer in many ways.

Never once has Rebecca or Kim complained about the many weeks of the year I am away from home. God's grace has been obvious in their lives in this and other ways. During the important teenage years the Lord did not open many doors for crusades. This forced me to spend big chunks of time at home, working in our area.

Kim was given a horse, and Rebecca had her airfare to California paid. Every year a couple have paid for us to enjoy a week's family holiday, skiing at Mount Ruapehu. We have been able to get the best piano teacher for them and send them on camps and outreaches. God has faithfully looked after them, providing even more than many families can afford.

Doing God's will may have high stakes, but there is no risk!

As the ministry of "This Is Life" began to develop, the Trust Board was convinced that tent crusades could be revived in New Zealand. In a remarkable way, the Lord provided thousands of dollars. This allowed us to purchase a lovely new marquee, seats, lighting, and sound equipment.

We started moving into this kind of outreach in faith. In May 1986 we had no crusades lined up, nor a team. We could not guarantee we would have them, so the stakes in our move were high. We had seen the feasibility and effectiveness of a tent crusade at Kawerau the previous year. The Trust Board got down before God and prayed, as did Marg and I.

We were gearing up for a specialised ministry, and needed God to raise up helpers. We had to trust God to lead us to places where we could serve Him. As the year went on, we were pleased to see invitations for crusades coming in.

By October we had four crusades planned for the following year, with other places showing interest. But we still had no hint of a team! God knew our needs, and we relied fully on Him.

We put together promotional material, encouraging young men and women to join the "Training in Action Team" starting in February 1987. We had everything in place: lecturers for the training sessions, crusades, camps, and outreaches - but no team. Would God be faithful and raise up the people?

While I was lecturing at Bible School, Rob Fleming approached me about joining the team. Others showed interest but did not apply. By early December the Lord had only given us Rob. December and January were busy with summer team crusades, and I could see February soon arriving.

Without a team, how could we run the tent crusades we had planned? How could we bring eminent Bible teachers all the way to Havelock North just to lecture one person for a week? There was no guarantee Rob would come anyway when he found out the team was just him!

We had started down a path where we needed the Lord to provide in order to fulfil our vision. God had wonderfully provided in every other way. We continued to trust He would provide a team.

God heard our prayers. He worked in the hearts of some who came on the summer outreaches. By mid-January He had drawn Andy and Barby Woodfield, Murray Weir, and Bryan Harman to join Rob on the full-time team.

God's Name is to be exalted and praised! He follows through with every need we have in order to accomplish His will. Sometimes we have to wait until the eleventh hour before we see His faithfulness - but He never fails. He is completely trustworthy.

Sometimes He provides in ways other than what we expect. On our return from the family reunion in San Diego, we landed at Honolulu for a two-hour fuel stop. We all decided to get off the plane and stretch our legs.

The plane was full. The Pan Am supervisor made an announcement to all the passengers waiting in the transit lounge. "Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. We have double booked fifteen seats on the flight from Honolulu to Auckland. We are asking any passengers willing to give up their seats to come to the counter. We will give them a voucher for U.S. \$800 worth of flying on Pan Am over the next 12 months. But we cannot guarantee when we can get you on another flight, and your luggage will have to go on to Auckland and wait for you."

Marg and I remained seated while a large number of people flocked to the counter. "It's not worth the hassle," we said to each other. About five minutes went by, and we both got thinking. The U.S. \$800 for the four of us would amount to \$3,200, which in New Zealand currency was about \$5,000 worth of travel.

"What do you think?" I asked Marg.

"Why not," she said. "But I think it may be too late. Look at all the people crowding around the man."

I went to the counter and found that the supervisor had almost finished explaining the conditions and answering questions. I was at the far end of the counter and had no hope of putting our names forward. I was about to return to my seat. But another Pan Am official asked the supervisor to move the group as he had to work on the computer.

The supervisor picked up his papers and walked to where I was standing.

"All right, who wants to give me his name?" he asked.

"Glasgow," I said. "There are four of us."

I gave him our tickets.

"Get your hand-luggage off the plane and wait over there for me," he said.

"Next please," he continued, as I made my way back to Marg and the girls.

"Do you realise we may be stuck in Honolulu for days at our own expense?" Marg asked.

"Oh! I didn't realise that!"

"You have to speak at our church the day after we get back!" she continued.

"I didn't think of that either," I said.

"O well. We'll have to trust the Lord," Marg smiled.

Within one hour we were on board an Air New Zealand 747, and flew via Fiji to Auckland. Going to Fiji was a bonus, as we had never been there before. Rajendra and Suzie Murti were close friends who lived in Suva. We decided to get off the plane and try to phone them from the terminal building. To our amazement they were at the airport seeing a friend off!

We boarded the plane again and a few hours later we landed at Auckland. The stewardess told us that our Pan Am flight had been delayed for over an hour in Hawaii. A lady on board had been very sick. It arrived late at Auckland. Two other jumbos had just landed, so the Pan Am passengers had to stay in their seats for almost an hour until the congestion died down.

We arrived at the baggage claim area to find our luggage was still on the carousel. The last passengers of our original flight were still going through customs.

God had given us \$5,000 worth of free flight. Why? We had no plans, and no need for it at all. We could all go on a holiday to Honolulu or Australia. But we did not think the Lord gave it to us for that.

A few months passed, and we got news from my parents in Brazil. They were planning to return to New Zealand and Australia for a furlough. Because they had the same surname as us, they were able to use the free travel. We sent the vouchers and thought no more of it.

Not long after, I received the invitation to Nigeria. When God began to open the way, we started praying for my fares. These came to about \$4,500. My parents wrote and said the Lord had provided the money for their fares. They wanted to give back the value of the vouchers so I could purchase tickets for my visit to Nigeria.

God knew in advance and worked out a plan to allow me to go. There is no risk in trusting God. Jim Smith often reminded me: "Without faith it is impossible to please God". He would say, "Every day I am trusting God for a miracle".

Sometimes there is a long wait before the Lord fulfils His word, but He will never prove unfaithful. "Faith invades the realm of the impossible" (Wm. Mac Donalld). "Faith begins where possibilities end," someone has said.

Chapter 8

THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD

PRINCIPLE

Doing God's will does not free us from problems and opposition along the way. God uses difficulties to accomplish His first priority with us - to conform us to the image of Christ.

It was not going well for the disciples in the boat. Every wave that crashed over the bow made their frantic bailing look more pathetic. The wind's noise competed with the angry sea. Huge waves suddenly appeared out of the blanket of the night, and the shrieks of frightened sailors pierced the storm.

Though jostled about, Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern of the little vessel. The disciples knew He was worn out by His busy ministry, and did not immediately wake Him. But things were now desperate! One more rogue wave and the boat would sink!

A couple of disciples shook Him, saying, "Teacher, don't You care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38). Jesus held the end of a rope that was whipping in the wind near Him, and pulled Himself up. Looking out at the furious storm He ordered "Quiet! Be still!"

Sudden calm! The waves sank back into still water. Silence; except for the light slapping of the sea against the wooden hull.

Astounded, the disciples looked around them.

"Why are you so afraid?" Jesus rebuked them. "Where is your faith?"

The disciples had been doing the Lord's will. They had set off in the boat on their Master's instructions. They were heading where He had pointed. But following the Lord does not mean He will make the way smooth and problem free. Faith is needed. Their response to the storm was fear, not faith. Had they paused for a moment, and considered the power of the One with them, they would have faced the waves with new confidence.

Trials or disappointments can quickly shake our confidence after we step out to do God's will. But storms are vital to God's good purpose for our lives.

God's will for us includes a far more important dimension than just guiding us in some of our decisions. Of course we must decide where to live, how to serve God, if and whom we marry, and which church to attend. But these come a long way down God's list of priorities.

He has a tailor-made plan to make us like Christ. His Word says: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified" (1 Thessalonians 4:3), and "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). God's will for our lives is that we first become Christlike, godly, and humble.

Romans 8:28 tells us: "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him...". We could be tempted to see the 'good' He promises as the removal of our problems, or at least the lessening of them. We expect God to heal, provide, or remove the difficulties.

But the apostle Paul did not have this in mind when he wrote to the Christians in Rome. In the next verse he explains the 'good' which the Lord has in mind - "to be conformed to the likeness of His Son". Paul encourages us to see our circumstances as part of God's great plan to mould us into the beauty of Jesus. In His mighty hand, the very problems we try to avoid are the tools He uses to train us.

Peter speaks of the same process. He writes in 1 Peter 5:6 that we are to humble ourselves "under God's mighty hand". His hand is at work in each of our lives. He does not remove the problems. Rather, He uses the pressure of difficult times to deepen our faith, strengthen our moral determination, and reveal ungodly areas that we are blind to.

If God sometimes goes to great lengths to guide our decision-making, He goes to even greater lengths to teach us lessons we fail to learn simply by reading the Bible. But the benefit of trials is not automatic. He calls us to “humble ourselves”; to respond to the trials with submissive minds. This will prepare us for the lesson He wants to teach us.

I had to go to Kenya to meet the elders of the Nairobi assemblies. We were going to make plans for an outreach team to visit from New Zealand. To me the trip was a waste of time and money. I was sure I could arrange everything by correspondence and phone. But the Kenyan Christians wanted to meet me face to face.

About that time my father was planning to travel through Africa, and said he would be spending a few days in Kenya. He offered to speak with the Nairobi elders and save me the expense of going. He phoned me from Kenya a few weeks later saying, “You must come. For some people it would not matter, but for the Kenyans it is vital.”

We had no spare money but we committed it to the Lord. He answered our prayers and provided the fare in a miraculous way. I managed to purchase a cheap return flight to London. Some friends in England were going to book me on a cheap return flight from London to Nairobi. I was to pick up the tickets when I arrived.

After spending ten wonderful days in Nairobi, I became convinced that the Lord had sent me. Like the disciples in the boat, I had followed my Master’s direction. The first part of the trip was plain sailing. Little did I know the storm that lay ahead!

I returned to London to connect with my flight back to New Zealand through Los Angeles. I had arranged to spend a few days with my sister and her family in San Diego.

At Gatwick airport I checked in my luggage and obtained my seat number. The airline removed the coupon for the flight to Los Angeles. Without my realising it, they placed the rest of the ticket in a cardboard envelope which doubled as a boarding card. I noticed that the boarding card could be ripped off the front of the envelope, and the rest discarded. I decided to do this, thinking I could fold the part I needed and put it easily into my pocket. I threw away the bulky part of the envelope and went to the boarding lounge to wait for our call.

The flight went without incident. I arrived at Los Angeles excited at the thought of seeing Heatherbell and Sherman with their family. I went to the airline's reservations desk to re-confirm my flight to Auckland, and could not find my ticket anywhere. I was about to search in earnest when it occurred to me that I had thrown it away at Gatwick Airport.

The airline was not very confident the envelope would be found, but they sent a telex to London. They said that if it was found, they would tell me when I returned to fly out a few days later.

I committed it to the Lord and went to San Diego.

Arriving back at the airline counter I explained my situation to the clerk. I found that no one had handed in my ticket, and the airline would not issue me with a replacement. I had to purchase a new ticket which would cost more than my original fare for the whole trip!

My visa card was near its limit, as I had to pay the London-Nairobi fare by credit card. I was stuck in Los Angeles with no money. I was also advertised to speak at a ten-day crusade a few days after I was due to arrive home. I explained my plight to the airline head office and had my travel agent try in New Zealand. But the airline was adamant. They would not issue another ticket without payment.

I was confident the Lord would see me out of the difficulty, so I prayed earnestly for His intervention. I phoned Marg, expecting news that she had received gifts to enable me to buy the ticket home.

"O no, darling," she said. "I have no money at all, and there are big bills waiting to be paid".

My heart sank. We were in no position to add another \$2,000 to the financial burden we already had. But I couldn't stay. I had to get home!

Then I remembered our friends in San Lorenzo. Tony and Gail Paine were special friends we had come to know at the intern training programme at Fairhaven. I had been corresponding with Tony about their possible coming to New Zealand to join us in the work. With this in mind, when planning the trip to Kenya I had arranged to fly to London via San Francisco. In this way I could meet with them and talk over the idea.

The flight from Auckland had been delayed, so I had missed the connecting flight from Honolulu to San Francisco. This forced me to travel to Los Angeles and then to London direct. It was a big disappointment to miss seeing them.

Now, two weeks later, here I was standing in Los Angeles airport with no ticket home. I thought maybe the Lord had overruled to let me see Tony and Gail after all. Maybe I should fly to San Francisco for a couple of days. The Lord might provide the money, or solve the problem some other way. I had enough credit on my visa card for the flight. After a phone call to Tony I was on my way.

Two days later I flew out of San Francisco on my way home. Tony and Gail insisted on giving us a loan of the money we needed for the flight. As a result we were \$5,000 in debt to visa, our friends, and the bills we had waiting to be paid. I felt sick. We had never been in debt before.

Marg and I had a private policy before the Lord never

to get into debt. We were not on a fixed income, but had always trusted the Lord for all our support. God had always provided. There were times when we were very short, but we had always managed to put food on the table and pay all our bills. As I flew home I wondered how we were going to cope.

We prayed in faith that the Lord would rescue us, and fully expected He would step in. But rather than relief, over the next few weeks car repairs and unexpected bills pushed us further into a hole. We felt like the disciples fighting the wind and the waves. All our efforts and all our prayers seemed to have no effect. As we sank in the stormy seas we would cry out to the Lord. Each month enough money came in to pay the urgent bills. Then, having gulped our breath of air, we would sink down under the waves as more expenses broke over us. This went on month after month until the pressure sapped our emotional reserves. We were left drained and exhausted, ready to give up!

For the first time since going into the ministry I began glancing through the Situations Vacant columns in the newspaper. A regular salary looked so attractive, and there were some jobs that looked perfect for my abilities and experience.

At that time I was due to begin a crusade in New Plymouth. I did not feel like going. I left Marg and the girls with a heavy heart. I wondered how I would be able to preach with vitality and power while I was under such a cloud.

Arriving at New Plymouth I went direct to the home of our friends Hugh and Moira Lewis. Hugh was always ready for a conversation about the Lord, and often had interesting insights into the Scriptures. At dinner we talked about the difficult times God's people often go through, and how the Lord wants to use us in our weakness. Hugh said, "God delights in death, burial, and resurrection".

Later that night I got before the Lord. I thought about those words and agreed with them. The old saying, "Man's extremities are God's opportunities" was true. I prayed for peace. I cried to the Lord to fill me with His Spirit and quiet my turbulent heart. I cast my burden on the Lord and prayed late into the night, aware that I had to find peace before sharing the gospel in the crusade meetings and visitation work.

Paul Overstreet sings: "You are the calm at the centre of my storm". I felt a sudden release. It was a calm over my soul like still waters. The peace of God that passes all understanding filled my heart and stood guard over my mind. I spent some time in praise and thanksgiving before enjoying a long refreshing sleep. I had experienced the truth of Jesus' words, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you...do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

The next morning I opened the Bible to spend time with the Lord. Before reading the set passage for the day, I reflected on the clinging financial burden we were unable to shake. I wondered if the Lord was saying it was time to leave full-time service and return to secular work. I told the Lord my life was in His hands, and I was willing to return to a job if that was what He wanted. But I knew that I would not be fulfilling God's calling.

I then turned to the Bible and read from Exodus 21. It was about the Hebrew slave who, on the seventh "jubilee" year, was free to leave his master. He could be set from free slavery. But if he loved his master and wanted to remain a slave, he would have his ear pierced with an awl. This branded him a slave for life.

The message was powerful and unmistakable. God was saying, "You are free to leave full-time work if you want to. You have a good excuse for returning to secular work because of your continuing financial problems.

But, if you want to stay in the ministry, you can choose to do so.

Old Testament slaves were given an opportunity for freedom every seven years. This prompted me to work out exactly how long it had been since we were commended. I came to the startling conclusion that Marg and I had completed seven years that very month! This reinforced my devotional reading and I had no doubt it was the Lord speaking.

I knelt down and said: "Father, thank You for giving us the privilege of serving You over the past seven years. I praise You for Your grace, provision, and protection during that time. Thank You also for giving me the option of returning to secular work, or remaining in full-time service. Lord, I do not believe we have completed what You have set us apart to do; so I give myself back to You and willingly continue in Your service."

Having found peace the night before, and now sensing that God had spoken to me through the financial storm, I fully expected it to lift. But money problems continued to plague us.

James wrote in the opening of his letter that we should consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds. Then in verse five he said: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." In difficult times we are to ask God for wisdom to discern what God is saying. We are to seek the appropriate way to respond.

This I did, asking the Lord to let me see His purpose in our financial burdens.

All these months Marg and I had not told anyone of our situation. Not even the elders of our church.

We thought it would be inconsistent with trusting God to tell anyone. We were “living by faith”. And we prided ourselves that the Lord had always heard our prayers and provided all our needs!

I had preached the principle of “living by faith”. Sometimes I had crossed swords with Christian workers who sought pledge support, or in other ways made their needs known. Trusting God alone had worked for us, that is, until the previous six months!

About this time George Verwer was visiting New Zealand for the first time. I went to hear him at the Baptist Tabernacle in Auckland. To me he was one of the great examples of people who “live by faith”; in the same league as George Mueller and Hudson Taylor. During his challenging message he shared how God had changed his thinking about keeping financial needs secret. He no longer opposed missionaries seeking pledge support. He only referred to this briefly before moving to his main subject.

I was hooked! I wanted to hear more. As soon as the meeting was over I made my way to the front and spoke with him. George said he would send me a tape outlining how God led him to a radical change of mind. I thanked him and waited a few weeks for the cassette to arrive.

I knew God was getting through to me. I was so set in my beliefs, so blind to what God was saying. I now realised that, had we not gone through the months of financial strife, I would not have changed my beliefs. God had to wear me down. He had to break me.

I had been looking with pride and contempt at Christians who did not keep their needs secret. To me, that was not living by faith. But on the tape, George likened my 'secret' faith to that of some extreme groups

who ignore doctors and medicine, claiming they are trusting God alone to heal. God opened my eyes to see the extreme position I had held, and forced me to reconsider.

I confessed my sin and thanked the Lord for showing me my pride. Within a short time we had received enough money to clear all our debts and catch up on unpaid bills. Marg and I learned that following the Lord does not always mean the path will be trouble-free. God's hand is not physical, but He uses physical things. He uses people, events, and situations outside our control to stretch our faith and test our commitment.

He disciplines us like a loving father with his children. The writer of Hebrews was guided by God's Spirit to write:

"You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.'"

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Knowing that God uses bad circumstances as discipline in our lives is “a word of encouragement” (v. 5)! At first glance the opposite may seem nearer the truth. But we can be encouraged to know that God has complete control of the circumstances that are outside our own control. He also has a good purpose in allowing them. He has a tailor-made plan for each individual son in His great family. Like a loving father, he has a vision, a goal. And He knows what is needed to reach it.

He says in verse 7: “Endure hardship as discipline”. God is not the source of evil. Even if the cause is the devil, God still wants us to see it as discipline. This was the case with Paul's “thorn in the flesh”. It was a “messenger of Satan”, used by God for Paul's good (2 Corinthians 12:7).

The Hebrew Christians were being persecuted. The book of Hebrews was written to encourage them to continue in their faith. The source of their persecution was not God. Satan used man's hatred and pride to oppose the gospel and strike out at believers in the early church. But the Christians were to endure the hardship as God's discipline. God not only disciplines us because of the wrong we may have done. He wants to build godly character. He also sees possible dangers, and deals with us lovingly yet firmly to keep us walking close to Him.

He used the thorn in Paul's flesh in this way. The apostle said: “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7). God knew that the special favour He had shown Paul could lead him to get puffed up.

God used preventive medicine to protect His valued servant from the destructive sin of pride. God not only disciplined Marg and me through difficulties beyond our control, He also made good use of my mistakes!

In the early days of “This Is Life Ministries”, the Trust Board decided to look to God for finance to purchase a bus. We made the need known and prayed to the Lord for His provision. God moved a dear saint in Auckland to send a large gift.

While conducting a crusade in Cambridge, we heard about an Auckland Regional Authority bus which had been converted into a horse float. It was for sale at a very good price.

I went with some of the team to the stud farm, and we looked over the bus. It had a reconditioned diesel motor, and had good tyres. There was major work needed on the body, and the transmission was in pieces. But we reasoned it would be a good buy. Earlier that year, a Christian engineer in our area had offered to do any work needed for the project. He said he would only charge for the cost of materials. His labour would be free.

We also had a qualified coach-builder on the team and others who would be available to help. We were able to purchase seats at a reasonable price, and we obtained a costing on a reconditioned transmission. Looking at these facts, and wanting to use our generous gift wisely, I decided to go ahead with the purchase.

When we returned to Havelock North I immediately got in touch with my engineer friend. “Keith,” he said, “We have had so little work over the past few months it has left us in a very precarious financial position. But now we have just started a big new contract which we desperately need, and we are too busy to help you”.

By this time we had replaced the transmission. We were hoping to get the bus roadworthy before the three summer outreaches. If it was not ready, we would have to hire another at a big expense. I therefore decided to have a local coach-building company do the main structural work.

They put three workers on the job, and with our team helping, the bus was gradually transformed back into a passenger-carrying vehicle.

Part way through those weeks of bus rebuilding I realised we were beginning to blow our budget. However, I did not sit down and figure out exactly what our financial position was. I glibly said to myself: "The Lord will look after us". I trusted that the transport portion of summer team fees would pay any outstanding bills.

Being an evangelist did not make me a good manager! But managerial skills or not, there was no excuse for slackness. My decision plunged the ministry deep into debt. The summer team outreaches did not keep within their budgets, and the bus broke down with major problems. We found out later that the block was cracked, eventually forcing us to replace the whole motor.

I had also been organising a music-festival outreach in Rotorua. This involved high overheads which would come on top of the bus costs. The Trust Board gave me the go-ahead for the outreach. But it was on the condition that I present the music festival budget to the person who planned the budgets for Youth For Christ's major events. This I did and was pleased to report that they would have approved our figures. We decided to go ahead.

The music festival involved 20 musical groups and artists. We advertised widely and sent promotional material to all church youth groups in the north of the North Island. Our investment was big, but with a moderate attendance we would make a profit. We had feedback that there was good interest and that we should draw a large crowd.

However, on the weekend only a small number turned out, and the outreach ended up about \$6,000 in the red!

A number of people were counselled on the Sunday evening. I recently heard of one who has gone on from

strength to strength since he trusted Christ at the festival. But at the time my mind was focused on the mounting debt. Sitting in my room at the end of the outreach I was distraught. Discouragement and a sense of shame weighed me down. Fear gripped me and squeezed the life out of me. God seemed to have let me down. Like the disciples in the boat, I was sinking.

Turning to the Scriptures I sought the Lord with tears. I opened at the Psalms and read the 49th. God spoke to my wounded spirit: "Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him; the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough that he should live on forever and not see decay" (Psalm 49:5-9).

If we had returned a profit and cleared all our debts, but not seen God's power in the lives of those who attended, would I be more depressed? Sure the outreach was a financial disaster, but it was a spiritual success. It was important to judge the weekend from God's perspective. The Psalm made it clear what God thought. "The ransom of a life is costly, no payment is ever enough" (verse 8).

But the encouragement of those Scriptures did not take away the realities we faced. The outreach debts added to the money we already owed. "This Is Life Ministries" was in serious trouble.

I was forced to write a letter to assemblies around the country asking for financial help. Trust Board members lost confidence and left. My credibility in the eyes of elders and church leaders dropped steeply. Some of those closest to me became very critical, and their attitude towards me infected others. For the first time in my life I found sleep elusive. Lying in bed each night my mind would go over and over the problems. The aftermath took almost a year to subside.

In Hebrews 12 we read, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by it” (verse 11). The value of God’s discipline can be lost by those who are not willing to learn through it. But those who “are trained by it” reap a harvest of righteousness and peace. The Lord used my failure and the financial problems to break my pride and self-sufficiency. He had been preparing me for yet another lesson.

Until that time I was in charge and made all the decisions relating to the ministry. Other staff just followed along. But when the financial storm died down, and we started moving ahead again, they were not content to leave me in control of everything. They initiated staff meetings, a system of financial management, and other controls.

The transition was painful. We were a team and had to be inter-dependent. Each person had skills and experiences to add to the decision-making process. My freedom to make independent decisions was taken from me. The new direction called for me to bow my will to the mind of others. This was not easy for me to do. It hurt my ego. My selfish, sinful nature screamed out for control. After all, I was the founder and the director! But it was not my ministry, it was the Lord’s.

Without the discipline of failure and deep financial problems, I would not have taken easily to the change.

I would probably have put up a fight! God had designs to change me, but had to humble me first. God taught me many lessons through the wisdom and input of the staff. I am richer for having passed through the storm, and praise God for His gracious hand.

Doing God’s will may at times be painful, but it will always be purposeful!

Chapter 9

ENEMY TERRITORY

PRINCIPLE

Satan is active to discourage, frustrate, and divert the focus and energy of those who are doing God's will.

When we respond in faith and perseverance to the devil's attacks, God turns his brief victory into a lasting triumph for the Kingdom of God.

Sitting at a table in a make-shift thatched room on the roof of Colleen Redit's home in Madras, I was praying. I had prepared the message for the crusade meeting that night, and it was heavy on my heart. I longed for God to bring many to faith in Christ. Multitudes in that city needed to be delivered from darkness and death. I prayed that the Lord would open their eyes to the truth of the gospel.

Someone downstairs called my name.

"Yes," I replied. "I'm up here".

"Colleen has just had a phone call from the C.B.I.," Joe said.

"What's the C.B.I.?"

"The Central Bureau of Investigation," he replied. "It is the Indian equivalent of the F.B.I.".

I leaned back in my seat. "Go on".

"They phoned the Haven of Hope Centre wanting to speak with you. Apparently you have to go immediately to the C.B.I. headquarters to receive a deportation notice for yourself and your team."

"What!" I choked, "Did I hear you right? Are they going to deport us?"

"Yes," he went on. "You have to be out of the country in 24 hours! Apparently they have been tailing you, and recording the team's activities over the past two weeks. They even followed the van when you all took the day off, and went down the coast for a swim!"

I made a move to stand up but Joe stopped me. "Colleen said to tell you that for now you would be best not to go. She has sent a couple of her friends to speak with the man on your behalf. If you went it would be much harder to resolve the situation. Just pray." With that Joe left, and I turned back to the open Bible before me on the table. As I looked blankly at the pages, I began to see some of the implications of the news I had

just heard. If we were deported from India we would never be allowed to return. George Verwer was a case in point. For many years now he has been barred from entry to India because he was deported for preaching the gospel. Other missionaries who had worked for several decades had, without warning, been given only one day to leave the country. They also were never allowed to return.

I thought of the team. Some had come with a desire to return and serve the Lord here.

I thought of the crusade meetings. Many churches and individual Christians were involved. All the finance and effort that had gone into promoting the outreach would be wasted.

My heart sank when I thought of the black mark that would be made against the ministry of Colleen, despite all she had done over the years for the poor in that city. After we are deported, she may be the next to go. What would happen to the hundreds of people she helped feed, clothe, and educate each day? Satan was certainly attacking.

I thought back to how the Lord had led us both and provided so we could fly to Madras. We were convinced it was the Lord's will for us to be there.

I closed my eyes and began to pray. I was strangely confident. I did not have to "work up" any faith. The Holy Spirit seemed to reassure me that He was in control. He would not allow His purposes to be frustrated.

I opened my eyes and looked at the Bible in front of me. My message was based in the second chapter of Jeremiah, but my eyes went immediately to some verses in chapter one which I had previously underlined.

"Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them."

Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land.

They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the LORD“(Jeremiah 1:17-19).

What a joy it was to sense the Lord speaking to me through these words! Doing God's will must, by its very nature, bring opposition from the Evil One. Satan hates Christ. He hates the gospel because it robs him of his hapless victims, and secures them in the Father's love. Every person set free from Satan's kingdom is proof of the victory Jesus Christ won over him at the cross. His defeat stares him in the face with every new birth. He is helpless to prevent the work of grace, so he turns his attention to the ones the Lord works through.

I saw that this challenge against the throne of heaven was from the pit. But the Lord was not about to let him gain the upper hand!

I prayed again, using the words of Scripture which I had just read. The Lord was going to make us like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall. We would be able to stand against any officials, because the Lord was with us, and would rescue us. There may be a fight, a spiritual battle, but the Evil One and his human agents would not overcome!

I was so excited that I went over my message with great expectation, almost forgetting the seriousness of the situation.

Later that afternoon I heard from Colleen that the deportation notices were already typed when her friends arrived at the headquarters. But one of her friends had

a relative who was higher up in the Bureau than the one who had investigated our team. He was able to convince his colleagues that we had no subversive or anti-nationalistic motives in our work. The notices were destroyed and we were able to continue. We praised God for rescuing us from the the Evil One's attack, and keeping the door open for many to hear the gospel over the following week.

We later discovered the reason behind the C.B.I.'s investigation. An angry Christian! She had fallen out with Colleen just before our visit, and had written to the C.B.I.. She told them of our coming to Madras, indicating that we were anti-nationalistic (anti-Hindu). A Christian filled with anger and resentment opposing another Christian was one thing, but to oppose the spread of the gospel was almost beyond belief! We gained insight into how Satan can use any Christian who gives him a foothold through bitterness, envy, or pride.

Satan's strategies are not always so obvious. In the book of Acts we read how he attacked the church in a variety of ways. Sometimes openly from outside, through persecution or opposition. Other times from inside the church itself.

In New Zealand today there is no outward persecution against those who preach the gospel. Satan has to use other means to try to prevent the message from getting out. The biggest single obstacle to our work in evangelism has been the tongue!

James says that the tongue is set on fire by hell. Satan knows his job! He seems to place great confidence in the tongue's ability to discourage, defame, and destroy those who are earnestly seeking to do God's will.

The smell of rotting seaweed and salt water hung like an invisible fog along the pebble beach. I sat on a log and looked out to sea through vacant eyes. Tears welled up as I thought about the unkind words which had been spoken to me over the phone that day. The accusations had crippled me! Surely they were not true! Maybe they were, and I should just give up serving the Lord.

The caller had accused me of being disorganised and unreliable. He had said he knew of at least 20 assemblies who would never have me back.

"I know I have made mistakes", I thought, "but I can't believe I deserve that!" For the past 12 years we have devoted ourselves to helping assemblies reach out with the gospel. We have seen the Lord encourage, motivate, and instruct many young people through team outreaches. And even if what he said was true, telling me the way he did had plunged me deep into discouragement.

I was especially vulnerable at that time because Satan had already made me punch-drunk with people's criticism. Some in our home church had criticised me. Co-workers had criticised me. People from different parts of New Zealand had received letters with misleading information about me. They had contacted us to see if the accusations were true.

But this last punch was the knock out! I had no more reserves. I was ready to give up and go back into secular work.

I stood up and began walking along the pebble beach. My mind went from place to place where we had held crusades. What had I done so wrong?

I could think of times when people or circumstances outside my control had caused problems during a crusade. People had let us down, team members had caused friction and disunity, some churches had failed in pre-crusade organising.

I had also made mistakes, especially in the first year of our tent crusades and full time team, but nothing that warranted such severe and cutting words.

I began to get very angry. I felt a strong urge to yell out, "It's unfair!" I desperately wanted to justify myself to everyone, to clear my name. My whole ministry and work for the Lord was at stake. I was tempted to return evil for evil and start criticising those who accused me.

But then I would become a tool for Satan to use as he had been with others. I remembered the words of Psalm 44 which the Lord had given me just before the first tent crusade. It was when some youths had tried to burn down the marquee the night before the crusade was going to begin. We recognised the opposition of the Evil One, which made the psalm all the more relevant to us.

The Psalm begins by recounting the way God had given Israel victory in the past: *"We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what You did in their days, in days long ago...It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your face, for You loved them."*

But the psalmist cannot understand why the same is not true in their case. They had trusted the Lord, just like their forefathers, but the enemy had won.

"But now You have rejected and humbled us; You no longer go out with our armies. You made us retreat before the enemy... My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame. All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten You or been false to Your covenant."

Then his eyes opened to the reason for their defeat. *"Yet for Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

They were ravaged by the enemy for the sake of God. The suffering and shame of defeat was because of their association with the Lord. They were involved in a far bigger conflict than the physical battles they had been waging. They were linked with the Lord's Name, and the enemy's attack on them was really an attack on the Lord.

The Psalm ends in cry of faith and expectancy: *"Awake, O Lord! Why do You sleep? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever... Rise up and help us; redeem us because of Your unfailing love."*

I knew I was not to try and justify myself. Nor was I to give Satan a victory by my grovelling in bitterness or nursing an unforgiving heart. Jesus cried from the cross "Father, forgive them..."! I must do the same, though my old nature was screaming for revenge.

But the gracious Holy Spirit poured oil on my raging heart. I prayed: "Lord, if it is true, and I deserve the things that have been said about me, I pray for Your special grace to learn what lessons You are trying to teach me. But if these words are untrue, and I am being unjustly criticised, I pray that You will vindicate me. I ask that You will show them mercy, and not hold these wrongs against them."

I sensed an inner release as God's Spirit assured me. I had responded in the right way to my accusers.

In Romans 12:17 - 21, Paul's instructions for believers who are mistreated is: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Do not take revenge... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

When Satan digs a hole he falls into it! When we respond in the right way to the devil's offensive, God eventually turns his brief victory into a triumph for the Kingdom of God. When Satan seems to have the upper hand, we must persevere in faith, and pray to God for Him to help us.

The last cry from the cross was not: "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me"! After the three hours of darkness and separation from His Father, the Lord Jesus looked to heaven and said: "Into Your hands I commit My spirit". His faith was rewarded. Satan's greatest victory was transformed into a glorious and unparalleled triumph for God.

Doing God's will is likely to attract the enemy's attention. Paul experienced Satan's opposition when he planned to return to see the new believers at Thessalonica. "For we wanted to come to you - certainly I, Paul, did, again and again - but Satan stopped us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Satan uses people to accomplish his evil plans. Joseph knew God's will for his life because of a dream God had given him. He trusted God, even when he was sold into slavery, then falsely accused and thrown into jail. At the end of his life Joseph could look at those who had caused him so much suffering, and say to them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish...the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

When Moses obeyed God by asking Pharaoh to set the Israelite slaves free, he faced immediate opposition. Moses' request aroused Pharaoh's opposition, and he greatly increased the slaves' workload. The Hebrews became discouraged and wanted to give up! Moses had to persevere in faith to achieve their deliverance.

God said to him: "Say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them' ". Moses then "reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage" (Exodus 6:6-9).

The Lord Jesus set His face as a flint when He stepped into public ministry. He would not turn aside from His Father's will when tempted by Satan, or when faced with the cross. He calls us to walk a similar pathway. Satan not only attacks, he tries to deceive us, and lead us away from our calling.

As a young man I worked on a dredge in Western Port Bay, Victoria. One of my tasks was to walk along the large floating pipe-line to where it rested on the mud among the mangroves. A white post marked where I had to jump from the pipe and make my way to a beacon light on a white pole.

The pathway could not be seen in the tidal mud. If I strayed off the narrow strip of submerged gravel, I would quickly sink into the thick slime. At first I kept my eyes down, trying hard to see where the track was. But this method was no help. I kept stepping off the gravel and getting stuck. Then I decided to keep my eye on the beacon light ahead, and walk in a straight line to it. The difference was amazing! I found that I could stay on the track all the way.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. With our sights on the Lord, Satan will be unable to turn us from our calling, or discourage us into giving up. We can continue on track for the Lord through the fiercest battles.

Chapter 10

LOOSENING THE ROOTS

PRINCIPLE

Prayer has a vital part to play in determining the will of God. Prayer creates the environment where God not only works, but is seen to work.

We were visiting Paengaroa, a small farming district near Te Puke on the east coast. I went for my daily jog while our friends Stuart and May Roberts milked their cows. It was late afternoon, and the wind was brisk. I decided on a long jog, as there was much to pray about. We had a catalogue of needs, and I was weighed down by the burden. The combination of fresh air, exercise, and time with the Lord was good for me. It often helped me gain a new perspective on problems, and renew my faith and vision.

As I pounded along the gravel edge of the country road, I prayed for a replacement for Shona. She was our children's director, and was soon to be married. I prayed for open doors for crusades, especially tent missions. We had an empty diary. I prayed for financial needs, an administrator, and some new full-time team members. We also had other difficulties which all combined to threaten the future of 'This Is Life Ministries'.

I Prayed: "O Lord, unless You intervene and raise up help, unless you open doors and remove our problems..."

Then I sensed the Lord speaking to me. My mind was gripped with the questions: "Why are you praying for these things? Are you just praying for them so that you can prop up 'This Is Life Ministries'?" My immediate response was clear and unrestrained: "Lord, no! I don't want to prop up the ministry unless You want to. "This Is Life" belongs to You, Lord, and I am Your servant".

My mind had changed down a gear. I began thinking through all the requests I had brought to God that afternoon. I saw how each one was directly related to my primary focus in prayer - to keep "This Is Life" going. But God may have other plans! Maybe the reason our prayers were not being answered was that they were not in line with the Lord's will. Were we being led by God to close 'This Is Life Ministries' down?

We had celebrated the ministry's ten-year re-union only weeks before. Many past team members and supporters had come with staff and Trust Board members for a weekend of thanksgiving. I had presented a 'Vision 2002' statement. This reflected on God's blessing over the first ten years, and projected similar growth into the following decade. To me it was a realistic vision of where the ministry should be by the year 2002.

"But Lord," I thought, catching my breath as I slowed to a walk, "I'm going to have to eat humble pie if the ministry winds up. It's only a short time since I presented 'Vision 2002' at the re-union. People will think I'm double-minded!"

I lifted my eyes to the darkening sky. "Lord, I commit myself to do Your will whatever it may be. If You want to wind up the ministry, please make it very clear to me and to everyone concerned."

As I turned to jog back to the house I thought back to a few years earlier. It was when I had seriously questioned the value of in-church crusades in New Zealand. Marg and I had prayed very specifically about moving out of itinerant evangelism. We had even started looking for a church where we could do a more localised work of evangelism and discipleship. We had wondered if we were in line with God, especially when a verse from the Bible impressed itself on us both. In Psalm 107:7 we had read: "He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle".

I remembered how we had been in touch with key people around New Zealand and overseas to make our availability known, but only one church responded. Marg and I had met with their elders, but there was no sign of the Holy Spirit's leading.

As the months passed, we decided that maybe we had read the Lord wrongly. There had been no “straight way to a city”. We could not follow the idea further without trying to orchestrate it ourselves and possibly overlook the Lord's leading. Also, though we were ready for such a change, leaving 'This Is Life Ministries' at that time would have been a major upset. It was not the right time.

I reflected on the intervening years. In a short time, God had brought 'This Is Life Ministries' to a place of weakness. It was not by accident or misfortune. God's providence had ordered the good and the bad. We had almost forgotten the way we had seriously prayed for the Lord to free us from 'This Is Life'.

“Maybe,” I thought, “now is the time to move into a more localised ministry somewhere”. I prayed once again for the Lord to show us clearly what He wanted us to do, and turned in at the farm gate.

The next day we arrived home to a phone call from Murray Weir, our director of follow-up. He said he had talked with his elders, and had decided to run the N.Z. Mailbox Bible Club as a separate organisation.

Had Murray said this to me a week earlier I would have strongly opposed the idea. The Mailbox Bible Club was an essential follow-up arm of 'This Is Life Ministries'. But I remembered what the Lord had said to me during my jog the previous afternoon. Did I need a bigger confirmation? Though it hurt my personal pride that Murray wanted to work separately, I could see the Lord behind his decision. If the Mailbox Bible Club separated, 'This Is Life Ministries' would be a much simpler operation to wind up!

There remained one concern. I had asked Linda McKenzie if she would like to take Shona's place as children's director. She had been on many of our teams and was keen to work with us.

Twice we had tried to set up a meeting with her church elders, but neither time had worked out. I sensed God's providence in this, and telephoned her.

I explained the new developing possibilities and apologised for having to tell her that she would no longer be needed.

I waited for her response...

"Keith," she began, "I was just about to sit down and write to you. Over the past few weeks I have had an increasing burden on my heart that I should return to my job after graduation from Bible School. I didn't want to let you down, but It has come to the point where I was about to write and say that I couldn't take the position".

Every major decision brings with it a certain amount of apprehension. I started to wrestled with doubts and fears. Were we doing the right thing?

One Sunday Randle Major, an elder in our church, shared a verse from Acts 13 which settled my heart and mind. He read "When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he died" (verse 36). I had no doubt that 'This Is Life Ministries' had served the Lord's purpose over the previous ten years. It should not continue just for the sake of keeping a good thing going.

I also considered that when I, personally, had served God's purpose in my generation, the Lord would take me home to heaven. Until that time I had not fulfilled His will for my life and ministry. The Lord still had useful areas of service for me.

With this knowledge Marg and I were free to move into a new form of work for the Lord. We were excited, anticipating a door to open somewhere.

About that time an English evangelist, Victor Jack, was visiting New Zealand. I met with him to discuss our change of direction.

"We are considering leaving itinerant evangelism," I started, "and want to invest our lives in a more localised work".

"I came to the same place ten years ago," said Victor. "Since then we have worked in our church in Bury St. Edmunds doing evangelism and Bible teaching. It has been the most rewarding years of our lives and ministry."

I shared how the Lord had spoken to me as I was jogging, and the events which followed. "But at the moment," I went on, "we are not sure what to do. We are in limbo. I suppose we just have to wait for the Lord to open a door for us somewhere."

"It seems to me that the Lord has loosened your roots," said Victor.

The thought snatched my attention. "That's right," I reflected. "God has answered our prayers from three years earlier. With the loosening of our roots God would surely move us to where He wants us".

Prayer kept us in line with the Lord's will. Had we not been praying each step of the way, we would not have interpreted these events as the hand of God. We could easily have engineered what we wanted, paying lip service to following Christ.

We began praying for guidance to the place where the Lord wanted us. But prayer without action is vain. Jesus said we should not merely ask, but also seek and knock. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened"* (Matthew 7:7-8).

Asking in prayer has a practical side. It should be accompanied by seeking and knocking. We must look before we find, and knock on doors where we think the Lord may have us go.

We began looking for a church where there was great potential - a church that was serious about reaching out, suited to our gifts and direction. Having been uprooted from "This Is Life Ministries", we waited for the Lord to transplant us. Realising that it may take some time, we spoke with our elders. We said that 1993 would be a transition year. We would continue in itinerant work, doing evangelism, Bible teaching, and team outreaches, and trust God to direct our future.

Prayer expresses our dependence on God. Since the Garden of Eden man has sought independence. It is the bread and butter of sin. Even as Christians we can be tempted into an independent spirit. True prayer is out of keeping with an independent spirit.

True prayer is when we come to God out of a sense of helplessness. When we pray for an outreach we are depending on the Lord to give power to the message. Unless His Spirit works in the lives of those present, all the publicity, music, and good programming, will not achieve anything for eternity. In the same way, when we pray to know God's will, we must realise that we can not know by ourselves what pleases Him best.

Some suggest there is no personal, specific will of God for our lives. They say we only need to obey God's moral will - that is, what the Bible plainly tells us. As long as we do this, they say, we can rely on God-given common sense when it comes to other areas. They accept God has a purpose behind everything that happens to us. But we will not know it until later when we look back on our lives.

We must be careful, however, not to rely on our own so-called "common-sense". To do so can lead to an independent spirit. True wisdom is not to rely on ourselves, but on the Lord.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight"(Proverbs 3:5-6).

In prayer we look at a new direction, realising that we ourselves do not have the knowledge and wisdom to make the right decision. We need the Lord's gracious help.

God does have an individual will for each believer. It was not the will of the Lord for Paul to go into Bythinia or Asia (Acts 16). God had a personal, specific will for the apostle and his team. As they trusted the Lord, He led them to Phillipi and other cities in Europe. Later they returned to Asia, the very area where God's Spirit had previously not wanted them to go.

Because prayer is an expression of our dependence on God, the kind of prayer that God hears is the prayer of faith. Not faith that God will do what we want Him to do, but confidence in His trustworthiness.

Faith clings to God's Word like barnacles to a rock. Genuine faith must have a divine promise to cling to. The prayer of faith does not presume to know God's will when faced with an important decision. It applies God's Word to the situation, and depends on a trustworthy God to take the outstretched hand and lead the way. Sometimes the Lord asks us to wait. But we can be sure He will make the path straight at the right time.

Old lessons are sometimes the hardest to fully learn. As in our earlier experiences with the Lord's guidance, patience did not come easily.

Months later we were still praying and waiting! No new direction was opened to us. We started getting impatient. We wanted the Lord to put our roots down.

On May 5th, 1993, I wrote in my prayer diary:

"12 noon - As I have read through sermon illustrations this morning, the Lord has ministered to my heart in the area of 'resting' in Christ, and of relinquishing any rights or seeming rights I may be holding on to.

As I spent time with God and read Psalm 131, He confirmed all this. I am not to think, seek, desire, or orchestrate any thing great for myself. I am simply to trust and rest on Christ - to wait on Him. I must rest as a child in his mother's arms. God is our hope.

O Lord, I do not know what our future holds, but I come to You now in faith. I rest in Your love and faithfulness. I relinquish any hold I may be trying to have on You for our future plans (a prosperous church). Please send us where You will and when You will - my chief desire is to do Your will. I bow to Your loving Lordship in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen"

Not long after, Arthur Shadwick got in touch with me. He had heard that I was interested in church-planting in Albany, north Auckland.

In the past we had considered a church-planting ministry, but had seen some failures. It would only work in New Zealand with a good core-group of committed people willing to persevere for some years before seeing solid results.

But Albany was an attractive proposition. Thousands of homes were to be built in the area over ten years. A huge shopping complex, sports' stadium, and university were all on the drawing board. It would become the hub of Auckland's North Shore.

We prayed and waited.

A year later we were still in limbo, with no evidence that God was opening the way for us to move north. At the same time, an opportunity arose for us to take a sabbatical study leave in USA, at the Institute of Biblical Preaching in Memphis, Tennessee. Family and financial restraints resulted in Marg staying at home. I was able to spend 3 months under the training and personal tuition of Dr. Stephen Olford.

My time in Memphis was significant. During the 'Summer Institute', God moved in a powerful way among all the pastors and evangelists present. On one occasion, after Dr. Olford had preached on the anointing of the Holy Spirit in ministry, several pastors were weeping, others were confessing, and all of us were caught up in a spiritual heaven of God's presence. The Lord did a wonderful thing, and as a result I was to return later to New Zealand with a new fire – a new empowering in my preaching ministry.

In the personal mentoring sessions with Dr. Olford, he encouraged me in the church-planting idea. He felt I would have more freedom to see a church develop along the lines I envisioned by starting from scratch, than trying to make changes in an established church.

I returned home with a clear vision to move to Albany and commence a new work. I shared this new direction with Marg, and we prayed together for the Lord to guide us.

That same day the Lord spoke to Marg through a passage we were considering in our home group Bible study. In Acts 16:10 Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia calling for him to go into Europe with the gospel. Luke and the other disciples, who were with Paul, concluded that God had also called them to go. Yet they had not personally had a vision. Marg had not received any specific guidance from God about Albany, but said to me: "Just as Paul's companions were included in his call to Macedonia, so I am included in your call to Albany".

The way began opening up for us. Our elders were behind our move, and God raised up another couple, Murray and Cindy Hutton, to join us full time in the work. But one obstacle remained – our home church was facing a growing crisis which had the potential of destroying it.

We were increasingly focused on our new start in Albany, but at the same time deeply concerned that our going would leave our church more vulnerable to a divisive spirit that was being fostered by a few. It was not an easy decision, but we felt confident that the Lord would have us remain in Havelock North for another 12 months, helping our church through the difficult time.

This long wait was part of God's providential timing. Over a year passed before we felt free to put our house on the market and initiated plans to move. We anticipated that the Lord would open the way before us – after all, we had done the right thing by remaining to help a church in need! But through the months following we did not attract a buyer, even though local real estate agents were selling record numbers of homes in our area.

Murray and Cindy had already relocated in Albany, and were waiting for us to join them. We had purchased land, and had plans drawn up for the new house. We borrowed the deposit and were paying interest on the loan, and also on the balance owing on the land.

Another six months went past with no change, and finally one morning I got on my knees and said: "Lord, I don't understand why You have not brought along a buyer for our house. We can't afford to pay the large interest payments on the land. What are You saying to us? Dear Lord, please show us clearly what You want".

I then turned to the scripture reading set for that day, and read the words of God to Jeremiah concerning the people of Israel. "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you My message. So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD.

“Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 18:2-6).

The application to our dilemma was inescapable. I got back on my knees and said: “Lord, You are the potter. I am the clay. You have the right to do whatever You choose with my life. Just as the potter can partly shape a pot and then remake it into another pot “as it seemed best to him”, so You have the right to commence one thing with us and then change to something else if You so desire”.

For the first time in two years I was open to a change of mind.

That very day we were heading out of town, and we stopped by at our church to drop something in. Russell Hohneck, one of the elders, drove into the parking lot at the same time, and called out to say he wanted to speak to us. He shared that the elders were deeply concerned that we had not sold our house, and were thinking that perhaps the Lord may not want us to go.

He then told us that he had just heard that Murray and Cindy had become so involved in a church near Albany while they were waiting, that they had lost the edge of their desire to help in church planting work. Russell then looked at us with deep concern in his eyes, and said: “Did you also know that four American pastors and their wives are starting a new church in Albany which will be called the ‘Albany Community Church’?”

My mind went immediately to the words I had read in Jeremiah, and the landmark prayer I had prayed a few hours earlier. Was God taking me up on my prayer? Was He closing the door we thought He had opened? Was He saying ‘no’ to something we had so confidently spoken about in deputation meetings around the country?

Other circumstances and counsel later confirmed it. God had closed the door on Albany. Once again we were aware of our uprooted state. But the clear evidence of the Lord's hand in the disappointing events helped us find comfort in the absolute nature of God's sovereignty. Disappointments were undeniably 'His appointments'. "What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open" (Rev. 3:7). We continued to trust His grace and goodness.

Our roots were still loose. It was now 6 years since we had first prayed seriously about moving out of itinerant work and looking for a more localized ministry. Every serious direction we had taken had resulted in a dead end. If it wasn't for our knowledge of the Lord's hand in the events that surrounded the changed plans with Albany, we would have been too embarrassed to seek any further direction. But we were confident that the Lord was in all the frustrating circumstances, and would eventually lead us to a place where we could settle.

Once again we started looking for a church where we could work, and to add a little motivation, our elders said that after January 1997 the assembly at Havelock North would not be in a position to help support us. A couple of New Zealand churches expressed interest, but nothing eventuated from these. January 1997 was looming on the horizon, and yet we did not want to make it happen by our own doing.

Then in September we received a letter from an church in Brisbane, asking if we were interested in taking up a pastoral/teaching position with them, and with a Christian school they ran. Again we began the process of taking prayerful steps and seeking counsel. We were positive about the move, and decided to visit them.

A short time after the airline tickets were purchased and plans were in place, we received a phone call from Lorna Pearce in Melbourne. "Our pastor at Canterbury Gardens Community Church is leaving and we wondered if you would consider coming?"

My initial response was negative. I told Lorna that we had committed ourselves to flying up to Brisbane for the church there. I promised to talk it over with Marg and we would pray about it.

Almost two years earlier we had taken a couple of weeks holiday in Melbourne, staying with Ron and Lorna, and I had preached at their church. We had both felt comfortable in the church, and as we prayed and talked together about the invitation, we both felt drawn there. It was a growing conviction that the Lord may want to place us there.

Lorna phoned back a few days later and said that the church would be happy to fly us to Melbourne. We agreed. Now we had two open doors before us!

Over the weeks that followed it became increasingly clear that we were meant for Canterbury Gardens. A weekend trip to Melbourne confirmed our inner sense of direction. We were thrilled to find a church that was Bible based, innovative, friendly, and above all seeking to reach the surrounding community with the gospel. The decision was prayerfully made, with the unreserved blessing of the elders and church members at Havelock North. We accepted the call and moved to Melbourne in January 1997.

Over the years that followed we have had continuing confirmation that we were in the place God wanted us. The feeling of fulfillment along with the deepening of friendships with God's people at Canterbury Gardens made us settle quickly.

It occurred to us that the ethos and direction of the church was almost identical with the kind of church we had a vision of planting in Albany!

Looking back at the years of frustration, closed doors and mid-stream changes of direction, we can praise God for placing us where He did. He loosened our roots and planted us where our gifts and experience would be best utilized for His glory. He placed us where we could experience a renewed fulfillment in doing His will.

After ten years at Canterbury Gardens we came to the end of our second contract. We were humbled to have seen God at work in so many ways, with the church having grown to more than double its size, due to the warmth of the fellowship, and the ministry of so many committed people. We were planning to continue on for another 5 year period, but I felt concerned to bring this to the Lord in prayer. *"Lord" I prayed, "if it is not Your will for us to continue on at this church, please stop us, and guide us to where You want us"*. The prayer was real enough, but I had little doubt we would continue on in the role.

The elders unanimously agreed to put my name forward at the AGM to re-appoint me. We were not able to attend the AGM as we were away that weekend. On the Sunday afternoon we received a call from an elder, Steve Bentley, who informed us that the vote was taken and the motion did not carry.

We couldn't believe it! We knew that there were a handful of people who were opposed to us continuing, but in a church of 400 people, the vast majority wanted us to stay.

We later found out that only 12 people voted against us. The church constitution required "80% of the members present at an AGM" were to vote in the affirmative for the re-appointment of a pastor.

That meant all who abstained were counted against because they were not part of the 80%!

When we recovered from the shock, we realised that God had answered my prayer. We loved the church, and believed most in the church loved us, so if God wanted us to move on, He would have to work in a way that forced us to take a new direction. This conviction grew to the point where we resigned even though the elders had offered us to stay on without a contract and thus not require a membership vote. Since that time, the church has amended the wording of the constitution.

God led us to Edge Church in East Doncaster, where we served for 5 years. Again, we were humbled by the growth that God gave in His grace, and were once again settled, with no thought of moving. Then the elders said to me: *"Keith, we will give you another 2 years, but after that it is highly unlikely you will continue as Senior Pastor."* Once again, I was stunned. I asked why, and one said that in 2 years I would be the age to retire. Marg and I were upset about this, as neither of us were old in our thinking and ways, and pastors tend to give their best when they are mature. We believed the majority of the church would want us to stay, but we decided to start looking for a new church.

Not long after, we heard that my old home church, where my family attended in my teenage years, was in need of a pastor. We approached the leadership team through a trusted friend, and the response was very positive. We met with them and began a dialogue about the role. They did not have a job description so we asked for them to clarify what the role would be.

Meanwhile, as they and Edge are sister churches, with many in both fellowships either related or close friends, we were forced to make a quick decision. In retrospect, it was a premature decision.

We thought God was leading us, and the leaders in the new church wanted to inform the congregation that they were considering us for the role. The news would travel fast, so I gave notice at Edge on the same Sunday the new church informed everyone.

As we continued, however, we became increasingly concerned. The type of pastor this church wanted was not a good match with my gifts and style. Finally after much prayer and counsel, we believed we should not proceed with the appointment process.

Marg and I reflected on the fact that this change was another of those times where we thought God was guiding us, and after beginning to move, were led in a completely different direction.

It was not easy to have to tell people that we were wrong and, as a result I was unemployed with no prospects on the horizon.

I approached the Baptist Union, Churches of Christ and the Christian Community Churches Victoria and Tasmania (Christian Brethren) only to find there were no churches needing a pastor.

Our daughter Kim and her husband Mike had moved to New York. Both Marg and I were very concerned to be close to them, and our young grandson Ace. I decided to prayerfully put my resume up on the "Church Job-Finder" web site. This led to an online interview and an open door for us to go to Carmel Friends Church in Indiana.

Each time God moved us in a new direction, we were conscious of His sovereignty. He worked out His plan, and our decisions wise and foolish; hasty or well thought through; were all used by Him to lead us to where He wanted us to be.

All our decision-making has been immersed in prayer.

Our reliance upon God, and trust in His ability to fulfil His will in our lives, has been a vital part of the way God has directed us. Our prayers and God's sovereignty are a perfect partnership. Together they produce peace, even when circumstances are difficult or hard to understand. Our dependence on God's sovereignty has often prevented us from pushing our way into something, or manipulating people and events to our perceived advantage.

Through all the experiences we have faced, we have come to the conviction that our one great responsibility in knowing and doing the will of God, is to do what God gives us to do now, and hold future plans lightly. God directs us as we walk with Him. He wants our daily love and commitment, and then we can trust Him for the future. We can prayerfully make plans, but we must be willing to be moved in new directions as we step out to do what we believe to be His will.

Chapter 11

GO FOR IT !

PRINCIPLE

Faith in the trustworthy character of God should lead a Christian to be decisive and positive when confronted with important decisions.

The idea of a sabbatical sounded good. Victor Jack encouraged us to take time out before moving into a new ministry.

"Sounds great," I said. The thought of getting away with Marg for a few months was attractive. It would also provide a natural break from our previous work, allowing time for God to direct us about the future.

"I would like to do more training," I added, "especially in expository Bible teaching".

Victor suggested going to a Bible college in England which had a flexible course tailored to our needs.

I sent for a prospectus and we immediately began praying. Other trusted friends and counsellors were enthusiastic about the idea. We sensed that it was a wise move in light of our new direction. We felt sure the Lord was guiding us, but we were not sure where.

After writing to England I heard of the Institute for Biblical Preaching in U.S.A., run by Dr. Stephen Olford and his son David. I wrote to enquire.

We read the Bible College prospectus and compared it with the training offered at The Institute of Biblical Preaching. The choice was obvious. Marg and I agreed to make plans to attend Dr. Olford's programme. We decided to go for a five-month internship beginning in January 1994.

God's people should be decisive. Men and women that God used in Bible times were characterised by decisiveness. They had faith in the God who acts, the God who delivers. They trusted the One who watches and protects. They moved ahead, sometimes against incredible odds, and proved God's faithfulness.

Their decisions were faith-decisions. They were not decisive because it was their nature. They were not confident because they were in command of all the facts.

Their decision-making was an expression of their trust in God.

Some Christians, sincere in their desire to please God, do nothing until they receive direction from Him. Like the man with the one talent in Jesus' parable. He was afraid that he might displease his Master. Rather than take a risk investing his sacred trust, he hid it. The others who had more to lose took a risk by trading with their talents. They received the Lord's praise, where the timid one stood condemned for his lack of faith.

But where there is no risk, there will be no reward!

Once a faith-decision is made, the Lord expects us to follow it through until He directs otherwise. We all make mistakes, but when we do make an unwise decision, He can change our direction mid-stream.

Marg has often said to me: "You can't turn a stationary ship. It has to be moving to change its direction". Decision-making for the Christian should be confident. Bathed in prayer and careful thought, a faith-decision is like throwing a line from your small dinghy to a passing power-boat. The Lord soon pulls us into line with His mind and will. Even decisions which may be regarded as unwise can be turned by God into a blessing.

Our decision to attend Dr. Olford's course was made. Months passed, and we continued to pray that the Lord would open the way for us to go. Some huge barriers stood in the way and made the idea sound like a dream. However, we had started in this direction and felt we should persevere until the Lord blocked the way.

For the whole year leading up to the proposed sabbatical we were in financial difficulties. The Lord was always faithful. We always had food on our table and managed to pay our bills. However, the thought of spending thousands of dollars on an overseas trip was ludicrous.

Then family commitments prevented us leaving New Zealand during the first few months of 1994. When Marg and I faced this together, I said to her: "Well, that's the end of our sabbatical next year". To our thinking, God had blocked the way. That very day we received a letter from David Olford. He told us that the course had been changed to the middle of the year! The way remained open. Our decision was still in line with the Lord.

Six weeks before the departure date we had still received no gifts towards the trip. I would soon have to write to the Olfords and tell them I was not able to go. For family reasons Marg had decided to stay home and perhaps join me for a few weeks in the middle of the course.

Marg and I prayed daily that the Lord would provide the money. I was due to meet with our elders. If I told them we had nothing towards the trip they would question whether we should continue planning to go. Then, on the night of the meeting, a couple promised to give a large gift towards air fares and fees! Our original decision was still intact.

The benefit from the internship with Dr. Olford has since proven to be invaluable in the years that followed. If we had not been decisive, moving ahead in faith despite the obstacles in the way, the blessing of that time would have been missed.

Harvard professor Harvey Cox said: "Not to decide is to decide not to decide". Decision-making can be a problem for some Christians. Not only do we have to consider others affected by our decisions, we also have to consider what the Lord wants. This can lead some to be indecisive. But the Lord does not want us to be of two minds when making decisions.

Like the heroes of faith in the Bible, we can hold our head up high. We can be bold and courageous. We can be confident in the middle of perplexing circumstances. As we step out on a path we believe is right, God determines our steps (Proverbs 16:9).

The causes of indecision

1. Lack of faith

Faith is the key to Christian decision-making. It involves confidence in the unchanging character of God. Those convinced of God's complete trustworthiness will have no difficulty trusting Him, even when making the hardest decisions. His providence, goodness, love, and wisdom combine to assure us. We cannot move out of the orbit of His sovereign control or His loving purposes for us. John Newton said: *"If it were possible for me to alter any part of His plan, I would only spoil it"*.

The evidence that faith is lacking can be seen in double-mindedness. *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt"* James tells us. He goes on to contrast faith with double-mindedness: *"He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind ... that man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does"* (James 1:6-8).

Stanley Jones writes: *"If you don't make up your mind, then your unmade mind will unmake you. God can do anything for a man who has made up his mind, but little or nothing for the double-minded"*.

2. Past Failure

Unwise decisions in the past can shake our confidence, especially if they affected our reputation.

Every important decision carries with it an element of risk. Past failure can highlight the risk of losing face again. Our reputation can then become more important to us than following Christ. We remain indecisive until we are certain that our egos won't get hurt.

We are servants of Jesus Christ. A servant has His master's interests at heart, not his own. Jesus said that His disciples must deny themselves. This includes putting our reputations on the line when following Jesus:

"If anyone would come after Me," said the Lord Jesus, "he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34).

Paul said: *"For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 2:21).*

Even decisions that are made prayerfully and carefully can turn out bad, crippling our confidence in God. But His loving control **was** involved in the outcome of those decisions! As a loving Father, God planned to build character into our lives. He may have wanted to break our pride, or teach us patience. Future decisions can be faced with confidence. God is in control and is worthy of our trust.

3. Over-concern about motives

Indecision can be attributed to an over-concern about motives. If we have a sincere desire to please God, we will check our motives when making important decisions. Our problem often results from an inability to identify what our true motivation is. We search our hearts only to find a number of desires, all influencing the decision.

The apostle Paul shared our dilemma! He was unable to judge his own motives. Even his conscience could not be relied on. Only God knew what was in his heart. He said: *"I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me... He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).*

We cannot choose to do something when our conscience condemns us. To violate our conscience is to sin (*"Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned... and everything that does not come from faith is sin"* - Romans 14:22-24).

Inability to judge our own motives should not lead us to become careless. Motives are important. God knows the hidden desires of our hearts. Our responsibility is to pray. Ask God to fulfil the desires we have, then leave God to be the judge of our motives. He says: *"You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives"* (James 4:2-3). He can be trusted to deny our requests when they flow from wrong motives.

After praying about our options we should be decisive, asking God to stop us if He finds wrong motives.

We will never have perfect motives, but our dominant desire should be to glorify God. What is our greatest concern when faced with a decision? What would trouble us most should the outcome be different from what we expected? We cannot rid ourselves of other desires, but we can commit ourselves to seeking God's glory above all else.

4. Always expecting God's special direction

Some Christians expect God to guide them personally with every significant decision they make. Indecision results, as the Lord does not meet the expectations they place on Him.

There are examples in the New Testament where God guided directly. But most decisions seem to have been wise choices made in the light of the circumstances.

Paul speaks of decisions based on what is advisable. He chose to remain where he was because of favourable circumstances. He made no mention of divine guidance. No doubt the Lord was in his decisions, but He allowed the apostle to use common sense in what he decided to do.

He writes: *"If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me...After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you - for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me"* (1 Corinthians 16:9).

One method used by some to try to determine God's will is called "putting out a fleece". This is taken from the story of Gideon in Judges 6, where God commissioned him to fight the Mideonites. God promised to be with him, and, as a sign, sent fire from the rock to burn his sacrifice.

Gideon then gave the Lord a specific sign to perform. Gideon left a fleece on the threshing floor overnight. He asked God to wet the fleece with dew, but keep the surrounding ground dry. God granted his request. The next night Gideon asked again; this time the fleece was to stay dry, and the ground to be wet. Again the Lord performed the miracle he asked.

Today's fleeces are put out to determine God's will. People ask God to perform signs which they have invented. There are some examples of Christians receiving direction in this way. However, the failure rate is high.

Gideon did not put out the fleece to determine God's will. God had clearly communicated that to him. Nor was he securing God's blessing on his mission, as he acknowledges that the Lord had promised to be with him. The purpose in Gideon's fleece was to confirm that God would save Israel through him. It was encouragement to go ahead even though he was the least in his family, and his clan was the weakest in his tribe (verse 15). He felt inadequate and found it hard to believe that he was the one God had chosen to lead the army.

God sometimes makes allowances for young Christians by giving clear, specific direction when they seek God's will. But as their faith grows He teaches them to trust His unfailing love, and make decisions without the prop of a miraculous 'sign'.

God's call on all our lives is to "go for it". We are to make the most of the time because the days are evil. Christ is returning soon and there is much to be done. We are to "Go into all the world...". We are to plant and water, to sow and reap. Our commission is to build His church.

He chooses to use ordinary believers who are available to Him. He looks for those who sincerely want to please Him. They must be willing to risk their reputation, their security, and their very lives by stepping out to serve Him right through life.

There is no risk in putting your hand into the hand of the sovereign Lord of the universe. He can be trusted to lead you through life and guard your steps along the way. There is nothing too big for Him! There is nothing too small for Him. Everything is small for Him!