

# The Jigsaw Puzzle

By Olive Borland



## **Dedication**

I would like to take the opportunity to dedicate this booklet to my family,  
thanking them for allowing me to print personal memories

## Introduction

### God's Purpose in Life

The reason for the title of this booklet will be revealed later, but I hope you will be patient as I need to tell most of my story first of all, but I believe it is sufficient at this stage to point you the reader to God's Word where it says, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love the him, who have been called according to his purpose*". *Romans 8 v 28* It is worth noting that this verse says ALL things, that means good things and bad things work together for good - God has a purpose in allowing us to have all sorts of experiences - who does this statement apply to? To those who love the Lord – why, because He wants His children to get to know Him, and live out His purpose in their lives.

### Knowing Real Life in Christ

Jesus said in John 10 v 10, "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full*". Jesus not only has the power to offer abundant life in this world but life everlasting in the world to come. I accepted that offer when I was very young and I am so glad I did, but He offers abundant life to all who take Him at His word. I pray someone will realize that knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour is having real life, or as He said in this verse, life to the full, and that they too will come to trust in Him for themselves.

# CHAPTER 1

## Beginning my personal walk with God

My first recollection of God dealing personally in my life was when I was eight years of age. My Granny Anderson had died and I remember being on the third or fourth step of the stairs in her home looking down into the sitting room where her remains were laid, saying to God, whatever she had I want. I believe He as it were put an engagement ring on my finger that day and from then on I tried to live for Him.

At this point, I want to pay tribute to my parents who were Christians; they did everything in their power to bring my brother and me up to know the Lord. My father was a Sunday School Teacher, Clerk of Session and an elder in our church (an elder is a person chosen by a congregation to oversee the spiritual work of the church). We attended Church every week, the Mission Hall on Sunday nights and to any other special meetings where the gospel (good news) was being preached. Quite often when I was listening to the Word of God being preached, I knew there was still something not quite right in my soul. In December 1962, when I was 15, the Faith Mission pilgrims, Norma Bell (nee Davidson) and Elsie McLroy (nee Love) held a series of meetings in a portable hall in the field behind our house.

I played the organ for the children's meetings and one afternoon as one of the pilgrims was preaching, I suddenly realized I was a sinner in God's sight and because He was holy He could not let sin into heaven so I needed to be saved. I knew I needed to ask Jesus Christ, the Son of God to forgive my sin and come into my life. I remember being in tears before Him, but I also remember the peace and joy that filled my soul and I am thankful to say that peace and joy still remains, 45 years on. In Joshua 1 v 5 God said to Joshua "*I will never leave you or forsake you.*"

I recall running home to tell my mother that evening. I now know that without realizing it, I did what God's Word commands, because it says in Romans 10 v 9&10 that "*If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For it is with your heart you believe and are justified, and it's with your mouth you confess and are saved*".

Later at a gospel meeting I remember singing the Hymn, *Trust and Obey for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey*. I realized that while I had trusted Jesus to save me, I was not fully trusting in Him in my life. That night I surrendered my life completely into the hands of God and He not only became Saviour, He now became my Lord as well.

## Unanswered Questions & Opposition

I had become a communicant just a couple of months before and I recall that during the preparation classes I was asking questions, trying to get answers about the Bible and our relationship with God. Sadly the Minister at that time would just say, “I am very glad you brought that up” but did not, or could not, answer my questions. After trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, I also remember being teased and mocked about becoming “good living” - one person actually asked what was this nonsense they heard about me, wasn't I a communicant. I remember as a young Christian and a young person being quite shocked and indeed surprised at the attitude and the manner of the people concerned.

## Encouragement

At this point, I want to pay tribute to Mrs. Kerr, our next door neighbour with whom I had a good relationship; she was then an old lady and has long since gone into eternity. After I became a Christian, she gave me a text for my bedroom wall. It read, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. This text has been my motto ever since and I have proved it to be true but that doesn't mean I am never nervous or that I don't feel inadequate, but I believe if God calls us to do something He strengthens and equips us for the task. Mrs Kerr also encouraged me in my walk with God. I used to think of her relationship with me being like that of Paul with Timothy in the New Testament where Paul was Timothy's mentor. (1st & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy)

I want to thank the people who I know pray for me and my family, and I also want to pay tribute to the people who prayed but are now with the Lord, I thank God for the faithfulness of these people in the gift of prayer given to them. I know I have been privileged to have known such people. Thank you Lord.

## CHAPTER 2

### How God uses our Availability

Prior to this time I had been learning to play the piano, getting lessons for short periods of time. I never did exams, but I remember my mother telling my teachers to just teach me a few hymns. I recall playing a hymn in Church when I was 12 years old and I can still feel the vibration of my heart thumping off the back of the seat. When I was 15, our minister's wife was organist but because they moved to another charge I was asked to take over from her (there was no one else). I have now been playing for 45 years, with a few years intermission when our older children were small. My sister-in-law and I now play in Rathmullan Presbyterian Church and the Milford Mission Hall on alternate Sundays; she plays in Milford Church and I play in our own Church in Kerrykeel every Sunday, with the odd exception when we are very glad we can call on assistance from friends. I always tell people that I can even add notes that are not written on the manuscript, but I do my best and I don't know about the folks who have to listen to me but I know the Lord has blessed me through serving Him in this way. I once heard someone say that God looks for our availability not our ability, although a little helps. I firmly believe as He has stated in the story of the talents in Matthew 25 v 14 –30, that if God asks us to do something for Him and we refuse, He will take away our ability, but if we do as He asks, He will enable us and give us more opportunities and abilities for service. I know He has led me to do so many things that I never would have imagined I had the ability to do.

### Further areas of Service

I left the Technical College when I was 16 and when I see the amount of study that young people have to do today, I realize I did very little, and I dare say many people might have cause to say it shows! But despite all that, God enabled me to serve Him as a Sunday school teacher for around 30 years. Because it was necessary to study God's Word in order to prepare lessons I always hoped that the children got as much from hearing the lessons as I did from preparing and teaching them, I just hope that I was able to pass on the truth of God's Word in a way the children were able to understand. These children are now young adults, many with families of their own; I often still pray that they will allow God will be their Saviour and guide.

I have also been president of the ladies organisation within our church, called the P.W.A., for over 30 years. Through having to prepare for meetings within this organisation I have learned a lot about the work that God is doing within Ireland and through missionaries serving Him overseas. My family and I have also made friends with many people involved in these and other areas of Christian service, people that we would not have had the privilege of meeting otherwise.

## CHAPTER 3

### Remembering Good Times

As a young person, I was very fond of working with children; I spent a lot of time when I was only a child myself helping a couple of neighbouring families with their children - these were great times and I have very happy memories. I can remember changing the nappy of one person, (I will not mention his name just in case he might be a little embarrassed now that he is older!) I changed him through the bars of his cot but when I was too young to do this task otherwise. I never liked playing with dolls as a child, nor playing with my dolls pram; I can remember if I took my doll for a walk my mother allowed me to take my brothers pram. It is surprising the memories that are coming to mind just because I have put pen to paper.

At our home my uncle had a grocer's shop and because we were very involved, we got to know lots of people from around a wide area. Great relationships were developed and friendships formed. I can recall many memories, but that is another story.

### A change of Plan

Because of my love for children, I had thought of becoming a children's nurse. I recall thinking I might not have the brains or the capability, but I now believe this was not part of God's Plan for my life. Incidentally, my husband and I have four daughters; two of whom *are* nurses (one specializing in cancer care), the second is a general nurse, the third is a carer for children and young people with learning difficulties and the youngest is an occupational therapist.

While I was still attending the Technical School, a friend told me there was a vacancy in one of the offices in McMahon's Garage, Milford and suggested that I should apply. I can still remember that interview; I was terrified and I know I didn't do very well, but I did get the job and spent five very happy years there until after I was married. Shortly after starting work, I was asked if I would play the organ in Milford Church as well as in Kerrykeel; this I also did for I think about five years.

## Romance

Around this time, as I am sure you can imagine, I had a few other things in mind - I had started taking an interest in boys! When I was almost 16 (well, 16 sounds better than 15), I went out for the first time with the one who is now my husband. This romance continued on and off, sometimes more off than on until I was 18, besides there were other fish to fry! Anyway, I thought I was too young to settle down. But somehow Eric had that come-hither and we got married when I was two months off 21.

I have got to admit at this stage that when I was just 6 years of age I had told my cousins that I was going to marry Eric, I don't remember actually telling them but I do remember being in my father's car along with my cousins and my father pointing up to Eric's home farm and telling them, "That is where he lives."

I thank God for Eric and our love for each other; I am glad to say our love for each other has grown over the years. While I loved him prior to marriage, he was more certain than me about marriage. I kept praying I was doing the Lord's will. I had questioned other boys about their faith but for some reason I did not question him: in truth either he was good counterfeit or I didn't want to see; only God knows. We had known each other from childhood, we had the same interests, went to the same church and school. He always talks of having to lift me up on the seat in school as I was a delicate creature!

From we were married, we read the Word of God and prayed together and it wasn't until we were married for two and a half years that I realized that our faith was based on different things. I recall coming home from a service one night; I was excited because a niece had stayed after the meeting to talk to the preacher about her relationship with God. When I excitedly told Eric what had happened, I realized he was not excited, in fact he was angry. Although he had heard the gospel preached many times, he did not understand that we as individuals had to personally put our trust in what Jesus Christ had done for us on the cross. That night, after talk, discussion and prayer he realized that he needed to trust in Jesus for himself, I am thankful to say that is exactly what he did that night in 1971.



## CHAPTER 4

### *Avenues of Service*

God now gave Eric peace in his heart and gave him the desire to speak for Jesus whom he had accepted as Saviour and Lord. Now he too was seeking the Lord's will for his life.

I am glad to say we had a very godly Minister in our church at that time and because of a shortage of ministers in the Presbytery, he started a lay preacher's training course (our Minister had the oversight of seven churches, which included our union of three, plus four other churches that had no resident minister at that time). Eric attended these classes although he only had primary education. He left school when he was 12 years of age, owing to his father having poor health. His father died when Eric was only 18 and he was left to run the family farm along with his mother. After our marriage, we lived together with Eric's mother in the family home. I just want to acknowledge her support and wisdom over the 8 years we lived together. She died quite suddenly after a short illness before the birth of our fifth child. It was great to hear her say before her death that she didn't mind when God's call came because she had made her peace with Him years before and I personally knew her faith had grown in strength in later years; I believe through the ministry in our Church at that time and her own reading of God's Word. We had many discussions about spiritual matters.

Eric has now been a lay preacher for 35 years and I know God has blessed his preaching because at least two people are now serving the Lord as a result of personally putting their trust in Jesus Christ through his witness in this way. God has also led us to serve Him in song, while we do not boast about our singing we have sung in many places throughout Donegal, Monaghan and a few times in Cavan We thoroughly enjoy singing praise to our Lord; it is so good to have a faith and a Saviour worth singing about.

Some time later Eric was approached about becoming a Gideon - after prayer and discussion with our minister, we joined Gideon's International in 1976. Gideon's are Christian business and professional men who give of their time free of charge to place the Word of God in the traffic lanes of life. It has been our great privilege to place Scriptures in schools, hospitals, hotels etc. in Donegal, Leitrim and Roscommon. At the beginning we placed scriptures in Sligo and Mayo as well until a branch or camp as it is known was formed in Sligo. The wives of Gideon's who are Christians can become Auxiliary members. We give thanks for the wonderful fellowship and friendships we have enjoyed with our fellow Gideon members down the years and for the joy of hearing that lives have been changed and blessed through reading God's Word placed by our members.

## CHAPTER 5

### Children's Nursing with a Difference

As I said earlier, I had thought of becoming a children's nurse - well indirectly I did, as Eric and I had 8 children of our own, for which we thank God. They have become wonderful young people, kind, thoughtful, generous, hard working, and independent people in their own right. We are so proud of them all and delighted that they are all great friends with each other.

Our first daughter to be married has given us three wonderful grand children; Kerrie aged 10, Sam 7 and Rachel 3, they are great children and a real blessing to our family circle. We have also gained a great son-in-law and two lovely daughters-in-law, with more prospects in the line up! We are glad to say our family come home often; that is as often as they can get us at home. As you can imagine, we have great times at Christmas and any other excuse when we can have all the family together.

It is our prayer that all of our family will come to know the Lord's grace, strength and peace as we have, and that we can all be united in Christ for all eternity.

### The Joys of Family Life

As you can imagine, with eight children there are many stories to tell of different happenings over the years, different birth experiences (perhaps you would rather not), the joys and trials of the early years, of broken toes, broken arms, sprained legs, septic fingers, appendicitis, car accidents etc. etc. As I look back at times when finances were tight and health issues were serious, it is great to be able to say that God has been our strength and provider.

I could relate how David broke his toe playing football, how Rema had her appendix out on Christmas Eve, how our next door neighbour lost her life when her home caught fire the night before. How our second daughter Alison also spent time in hospital when she had grumbling appendix. I recall how when Jonathan had whooping cough and Rema although only about 6 years old, knew how to lift him into an upright position in the pram when he went into spasms of coughing and I couldn't get to him first.

I remember when Roger had to go to hospital with an infected finger and the doctor feared the bone might get infected. Amanda was so bad with whooping cough when only a few months old, she used to change colour because she could not get a breath. I recall on many

occasions having to run out into the open air with her and clap her back, even turn her upside down, anything to make her take a breath. I could also tell of Jonathan's visit to hospital with suspected appendix where he was fasted for almost three days and poked and prodded by a young doctor who could not get blood and how after being discharged he vowed that he would make sure he needed an operation before he would return to hospital again. There were also a few car accidents that occurred over the years. I thank God that our family are now all strong, healthy and well adjusted adults.

In order for you, the reader, to understand why I am writing this booklet I need to tell you in more detail about a couple of major experiences and Gods dealing with me through them.

## CHAPTER 6

# Meningitis

First of all, I want to tell you about our youngest son Alister. When he was just two weeks old, as I was trying to feed him on that Sunday I realized he was not his usual bright, alert self; in fact he was listless. When someone came through the door into the living room where we were sitting, he jumped or jerked. I shared my fears with Eric and he suggested that we take him to the doctor right away. As I was putting on Alister's cap, having done so only a couple of days before, I said, "Your face has really grown since the last day you had that cap on".

The doctor in his home a few minutes later took the baby's temperature and began examining him thoroughly; we could see he was very concerned and puzzled, he then put his hand on Alister's head, and he not meaning to take the Lord's name in vain said, "My God, get up the road quick". We had to go to the hospital directly - he would not even allow us to go home and inform the other children, although our home was only a couple of minutes away. We had to call my parents and ask them to look after the other children.

In the hospital, Alister was whisked away and for a long time no one came near us, or wanted to speak to us and we suspected that something was seriously wrong. Eventually, we were called into the doctor's office and with a nurse we knew in attendance, we were told that our child could die or be badly handicapped. We were informed that a lumbar puncture had been done and the diagnosis was bacterial meningitis. The doctor told us they already had our son on the necessary medication in an isolation ward. I was in tears of course, and although we had contacted my parents to do the needful at home, we had been away such a long time, we knew we needed to go home and sort things out and then return to the hospital. The doctor ensured us that everything possible was already being done.

When we went out to the car in the park, Eric said, "I think we should pray about this." We did so there and then. In his prayer Eric said, "Lord you know that the day this child

was born I dedicated him to you”; immediately my attention was alerted, because just prior to Alister’s birth I too had done the same.

Prior to the birth we had a student for the ministry working in our church during that summer and as he was bidding me farewell in front of our church hall at the end of August, he wished me all the best with the birth of my expected child who was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> September. Because some of our older children had put their trust in Jesus as Saviour, the student said, “I hope this will be another little one who will trust the Lord”. I, not knowing whether I was expecting a girl or a boy replied, “It is already dedicated to him anyway.” The student continued, “I suppose that is what we do when we bring our children for baptism.”

Now as Eric and I were praying in the car and I recalled what happened on that day, God’s peace fell upon us and enabled us to say, “Lord, he is your child, whether you are going to use him in two weeks, two years, twenty years or eighty years” and in faith we entrusted him into God’s care and keeping. As far as I can remember, Alister was hospitalized for 2 weeks, he had been very ill, but we thank God he was well considering the diagnosis, although weak when discharged. Afterwards our doctor always said it was a miracle that he detected the seriousness of the problem that day; he said that if he had been called out to see the child at night he feared it would have been a different story.

In February, other members of the family took flu and Alister’s head bulged again. The doctor on seeing him this time feared that his head had bulged even more than before, but after another lumbar puncture no meningitis was found. Again he was an extremely sick child, although in an isolation ward, he took gastritis and thrush. He went back to being like a new born baby. Because he was so ill, my mother could not bring herself to go and see him in the hospital.

Our friends Marion & Stewart McClure, who now reside in Australia, had a prayer meeting for Alister in their home where they lived near us at that time. Concerned people came along and my recollection of that day is that there was as much crying as praying. After the meeting, my mother said she would go with me to the hospital the following day. Next morning, I had business to do in an insurance office prior to going to the hospital. When I entered that office I found that there was just one lady to attend to three queues of customers. I spent so long there that when I was leaving; I met Eric in the doorway. The hospital had rung our house 20 miles away to say that Alister was getting home and Eric had arrived with clothes etc.

On entering the isolation ward, we were very concerned because Alister did not look at all well; I recall my mother saying there must be a mistake. Why was he being discharged when it was obvious that he wasn’t well? A nurse informed me that they realized that he wasn’t well, but there was an epidemic in the hospital and they advised us to take him home and see what we could do, because in her opinion he was going to get worse in there. We got him dressed and as we entered the lift we noticed him looking around, showing interest. At home, we were surprised to see him looking with recognition at things like his teddy and cushion; there was an improvement. We were so thankful; he continued to improve and had no further occurrence of the sickness. We believed that God had again answered our prayers.

## CHAPTER 7

### *German measles - Miscarriage*

During the following summer, friends invited us to their home one beautiful Sunday evening; we had a picnic on their lawn but Alister was off colour. Then I saw the red rash and because I was now almost four months pregnant with what should have been our seventh child, I was concerned because I suspected German measles. I will relate later my thoughts and feelings at that time, but suffice now to say that I contacted the Doctor that evening to be told that I had no immunity and would have to get an injection from the hospital the following day.

Prior to this pregnancy there was an Abortion Reformation in Ireland. While I was totally opposed to abortion, when the day of the voting came around, I could not bring myself to vote. I was confused about the policy on abortion in Ireland at that time: would the life of the mother be ignored in certain circumstances in order to save the child, e.g. in a car accident? A stupid thought I know, perhaps I was being tested with regard to my own thinking. Anyhow, a short time later, one Friday, the question in my mind was could I possibly be pregnant?

I believe the sly old tempter, Satan, came to my mind with all sorts of problems should that be the case. How was I going to cope; we could not afford another child, I had given away all the girls clothes, if this was a girl how were we going to afford more, how was I going to tell my brother and sister-in-law, they had been married for years and desperately wanted children and now I was going to have my seventh, how was I going to face the people that teased me and thought I was mad to have as many children anyway.

This battle raged in my mind from Friday until Sunday when a visiting speaker to our Church read from Psalm 139 where it says God knows us when we are in our mother's womb and has numbered our days. I thought, Lord if this reading is especially for me and if it is your will that I am pregnant, I don't care if the world stands on its head. I don't recall anything else about that service until the end of the sermon and the speaker said, "Take up thy cross." It seemed as if these words were printed in large print in my mind and I thought, Lord what cross? - I don't consider seven children a cross. I remember thinking that to be unable to have children would be a much bigger cross. Then, the thought of a disabled child came to my mind and I remember thinking why are you making me think about a handicapped child. In a flash, the thought was gone. I was at peace; I went out from that service and immediately told I was pregnant.

Everything was fine as you know until we were visiting at our friends' house almost four months later and discovered that Alister had German measles. In case you don't know, a

pregnant woman coming in contact with German measles in the first months of pregnancy can cause the unborn child to be born disabled.

In that garden the tempter again came to my mind and said, “Now what do you think about your abortion referendum, now you are going to have a disabled child?” If you were in England or Northern Ireland scans would be done? The battle raged on until we went to a meeting that evening where a friend was the speaker, I don’t recall one word of the service, but I know there was a verse of Scripture that brought peace to my soul. I remember thinking, Lord the one thing I can’t understand is why you allow a child to be born disabled, but if that is your will, you will have to give me the strength to cope. God’s peace again was very real.

( I can now see that we are all precious in God’s sight whether we are born physically *normal* or with what society regards a disabled, whether that is a intellectual or physical disability, in fact I believe that God may regard people with challenges as more normal than the physically well. In fact I think that people with health problems hold a very special place in His heart. In John 9 the disciples questioned Jesus about the man who was born blind, whether it was he who had sinned or his parents and Jesus said, “ neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life”. I think that God in his wisdom has given all of us something to keep us from pride. I was born with a squint in my eye).

That evening as you know, we called with our doctor who did a test that showed that I had no immunity. I had to have that injection from the hospital, but I knew that something had happened. I began to feel as if I wasn’t pregnant and yet I was almost four months on in that pregnancy. Everything went on as normal for three more weeks and then I had a show of blood and had to go to hospital for a scan. Earlier, when I thought about abortion at the time of the referendum, I was horrified at the thought of what is done to an unborn child during an abortion.

When I was now having that scan, on the screen I saw what looked like a little doll lying curled up as if asleep at the bottom of my womb. All I could say was, “Thank you Lord, you have done it your way”. I was happy for my child who I felt was going to be spared many problems. I was just sorry I could not explain to the doctor.

During the time that followed in the theatre or wherever, I felt that I was being cushioned by God. When returned to the ward I began to haemorrhage; this continued for hours. I felt so sorry for the two nurses in attendance: they were so busy with other patients as well and one was seven months pregnant herself. I asked God to stop the bleeding, in fact at one point I lost patience with God and in exasperation asked, “ God are you sleeping?”.

In the middle of the night the doctor was called and after working with me for a time, things improved. When morning came, the nurses asked if I thought I was strong enough to sit out while they made the bed. As I was taken out to the chair, I was fainting; the question came to mind, was I dying? I knew I had lost a lot of blood. I remember thinking that is alright, I know where I am going. Eric then came to mind and I thought he will manage if he has to, the four older children came to my mind in block and I thought they can do most things for themselves, I think they will cope. Then the two youngest boys came to my mind and I thought Lord, they are very young to be left. Just then, as the nurses were getting me back into bed, lowering my head to bring back the blood to my brain, the words of Psalm 121 came to my mind.

### *Psalm 121 Metrical Version*

I to the hills will lift mine eyes,  
From whence doth come mine aid.  
My safety cometh from the Lord,  
Who heaven and earth hath made.

Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will  
He slumber that thee keeps  
Behold, he that keeps Israel,  
He slumbers not, or sleeps.

The minute the word safety came to my mind, I knew that I wasn't dying. As my mind repeated the second verse, remember, I had asked God a few hours before if He was sleeping and now I knew that He had brought these words to my mind to let me know that He was in control and knew all about what I was going through

## **God can meet us in the Valley**

Very often, I have found in the past that when I have had a precious time with the Lord or what I call a mountain-top experience, I can then go into the valley. Because of Alister's illness and then the miscarriage I had not been able to attend the Bible study / Prayer meetings for a time and I was feeling the weaker for it. I was trying to pray but it seemed as though my prayers were hitting the roof.

## CHAPTER 8

### Picked and Preserved for Service

It was now autumn, - blackberry picking time - and my mother arrived suggesting that she would mind the children while I picked some fruit. I went to a neighbour's field to where I knew there was a good crop. The minute I went through the gate into that field, the Lord's presence became very real to me. I was reminded of Jacob in Genesis 28 v 10-22, when in a dream he saw a staircase reaching from earth to heaven and he saw the Lord at the top of it. While walking across the bottom of that field, four letters beginning with the letter 'P' came to mind. I was getting a message and it wasn't only for me, it was for the Church.

The four words that came to mind were: Pricked, Picked, Preserved, and Privileged. The first thought was that this fruit wasn't going to jump off these brambles and come into the house to me; I or someone else was going to have to pick them. The thought for the Church was that the folk who don't know the Lord are not going to come into the Church; the Church must go out with the Good News of the Gospel and invite them in.

#### PRICKED

I realized that if I was going to get this fruit, I was going to have to be prepared to get my hands stained, scratched and pricked. I was reminded as when picking the blackberries, that reaching out to others with the gospel is not always going to be easy either.

#### PICKED

As I approached the ditch, I discovered there were five different types of berries:

- The black berries were ready to be picked.
- The red berries were almost ready.
- The green berries were a long way from being ready.
- The moulded berries were beyond use.
- The remaining berries were out of reach.



How sad I would have been had all the fruit been moulded when I got to that field. The question that came to my mind was: how does God feel when his children are too lazy or just can't be bothered to pick the fruit for his spiritual harvest as commanded? In Matthew 28v18, Jesus says "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations*". Notice he did not say wait and the people will come to you.

As with these berries, I was made aware that people too are at different stages and that sometimes we need to be patient. 2nd Peter 3 v 9, reminds us, *The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Now many years on, I have to admit that I have not always been as faithful as I should in reaching out to others with the Good News of the Love and Mercy of God.

Then there were the berries that were out of reach across the drain. It wasn't wise for me to overreach unless I had very firm footing and a secure hold on a strong branch. This made me think of people that were involved perhaps in the occult, something I did not have a lot of knowledge about. Perhaps someone with experience would be better able to reach people in that situation.

## PRESERVED

Pricked and Picked, now Preserved. I was picking this fruit to preserve it in jam; I was reminded that God had picked me to preserve me for eternity. Thank you Lord.

## PRIVILAGED

Lastly the word Privileged. I was privileged to get the blackberries, but I was also privileged that the Lord had picked me and now it was my privilege to go and help pick others. I did not want to leave the field that day, it was a very special, precious time, and I would again call it a mountain top experience.

## Why Mountain Top Experiences then times in the valley?

As I was travelling over the top of the mountains between Kerrykeel and Rathmullan on my way to play the organ in Rathmullan Presbyterian Church some time later, I was questioning the Lord as to why I didn't always stay at that same place with Him. As I looked ahead of me, I was looking over the tops of the hills and although the sight was beautiful all I could see was Lough Swilly in the distance and the hills on the far away shore. I couldn't see into the valleys, I couldn't see the homes or the people and I believe the Lord was reminding me that we have to live in this world and experience life with all its problems, so that through our experiences we can grow in faith and dependence on Him and as a result be better able to help and sympathise with the people we meet on a daily basis.

I have also got to admit that I am not always as close to God as I should be, because I am not reading His Word or communicating with Him in prayer as I ought. Just as with earthly relationships, our relationship with God needs to be kept alive. Of course, if we sin we put a wedge between ourselves and God. God is holy, He cannot look on sin, but He reminds us in 1John 1v 9 that *"If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

God also convicted me that I do not always think of, or see people as He does. In a dream while writing this I saw a huge strawberry plant laden with beautiful fruit and I thought what potential. I believe God was showing me that sometimes I look at people whose lives are in a mess, and rather than seeing these people as God sees them, as people with potential, I can often like the folk in the story of the Good Samaritan, pass by on the other side. When Jesus was on earth he said, as we read in, John 12 v 47. *"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him" "For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it."*

I was reminded that in James 4 v 12 it says, *"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?"* I thank God we are still living in what the bible calls the days of grace (undeserved favour). But God tells us in Acts 17 v 30 & 31. *"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."*

How glad I am that we have an advocate with the Father, the man Christ Jesus. We have a Saviour who understands and sympathises with us.

*Hebrews 4 v1 4-16 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are - yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

As I now read Jacob's account in Genesis 28, Where God says to Jacob, *"I am with you and will watch over you, wherever you go - I will never leave you"* - *When Jacob awoke he thought, Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it - How awesome is this place*

.I realizes these were exactly my thoughts and feelings in that field; although I wasn't asleep and I was aware of God's presence. How great is our God that He should stoop to us in this way.

## Questioning God

Because of writing this booklet, I started to recall again what happened the day I went to pick those blackberries, now 25 years ago. I began to think about the events that had taken place prior to that day and questioning God, I again reread the story of Jacob. I had always wondered why God had put the thought of Jacob in my head as I entered that field, I had thought it was because Jacob had experienced God's nearness, as I did when I went through that gate, but now I think God wanted me to see a lot more.

I began to look at the events that had taken place during that year that had just then passed into eternity. Alister had been born in September, had meningitis 2 weeks later, returned to the hospital in February, pregnancy and miscarriage four months on, now September was upon us again and after the happenings of this past year, I was feeling that God was out of reach when I entered that field.

As you read on, you will see this was not the end; I believe God led me through this experience to now show me that He knew what was ahead and that He was with me in every situation. I hope you will be able to sense a little of the wonder of God that I experienced that day and in the days that were ahead. Please do read Jacob's story for yourself because I believe he like me may have been questioning what God was doing in his life at that time.

Although Jacob had strange, difficult happenings in his life after God met him through that dream, he was able to say in chapter. 35 v 3, *"God has been with me wherever I have gone"*. Note that his wife Rachel died at the birth of her second child v 18; only a few verses after Jacob made that statement. We are reminded that in this world, life is not always going to be easy, but if we have the Lord as our Saviour and Friend He will help us carry our load and we will ultimately spend all eternity with Him where there will be no sorrow, pain or suffering.

## Physical & Spiritual Birth

As you can imagine, life was fairly busy with by this time six children, living and working on the farm where we kept cattle and sheep. We also grew barley and potatoes for sale. Eric also did a lot of land reclamation over the years.

Let me tell you about an experience I had one night as Eric and I were assisting a ewe that had difficulty lambing. It was in fact 2.00 a.m. in the morning. As I knelt behind this sheep; my hand was smaller than Eric's so it was easier for me to carry out the procedure. As I knelt there, thoughts began to tumble through my mind. Firstly I was reminded that we all have to be born to get into this world, but that Jesus said we have to be born again to get into heaven.

In John chapter 3, when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, a Pharisee (a Pharisee is a teacher who believed in God and strictly kept the Jewish laws, "a holy man"), Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again; Jesus repeated this fact three times - when something is repeated in the bible, it is done to emphasise the importance of what is being stated. Jesus did not say to Nicodemus you *should* be or you *could* be; he said you *must* be born again. He went on to say that flesh gives birth to flesh but Spirit gives birth to spirit. He continued in verse 16, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will have eternal life*".

As I was now helping this lamb to come into the world, I realized that some people come to trust in God very simply; like me when I was little more than a child, this resembled normal physical birth, whereas many try to come the wrong way, like this lamb that was coming back to front. Some people like Nicodemus try to come to God through going to Church, good living, good works, by doing penance etc., whereas God offers us salvation as a gift. Romans 6 v 23, "*The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*". We don't have to buy or work for a gift, it has already been paid for, and all we need to do is accept it to make it ours.

## Registration

This newborn lamb was now part of the sheep family; it would never be a cow, a hen, or a dog. The farmer has to register that lamb's birth. God also records the newborn Christians birth.

Revelations 3 v 5, "*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white; I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels*".

Revelations 21 v 7, *“Nothing impure will ever enter it (heaven), or anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lambs book of life.*

## The Cleaning Process

Now after the lamb was born it was slimy and messy, the ewe got to her feet and started to lick the lamb. She licked and licked until the lamb was clean, sometimes she was a bit rough tossing it from side to side until she was satisfied it was clean.

I was reminded that some people are of the opinion that they have to clean up their life before God will accept them. In 1 John 1 v 9 we are told, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness,”*

Sometimes this process can be difficult for the new-born Christian as well. Because we have our old nature, there will be things in our life that the devil will make it difficult for us to let go of, and he being the sly old fox will try in every way and through every means to take us away from God, so therein begins spiritual warfare. In the story that Jesus told about the Good Shepherd He warned, *“The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”*. This is why we need to remember, as stated in 1 John 4 v 4 *He that is in us is greater than He that is in the world.* Romans 8 v 37, *“In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”*.

Titus 3 v 3-7, *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures but when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.*

*He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that having been justified by his grace we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life*

## Spiritual Food

Now that the lamb was clean, it started to try to get to its feet; it had a purpose in doing so, to get milk from its mother. If a newborn lamb does not get that special milk called colostrum after it is born, and then continue to feed throughout life, it will die.

God's Word reminds in 1 Peter 2 v 2, *"Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good"*.

## Keep the Communication Channels Open

The ewe and lamb now begin to bleat or communicate with each other; this reminded me of the necessity of communing with God in prayer. Later when amongst a flock of sheep, as when they are being clipped, dosed, or even in a field the ewe and lamb may get separated while grazing, but they will always know one another by their bleat. John 10 v 3 talks about Jesus the Good Shepherd, it says *"The watchman opens the gate for Him, and the sheep listen to His voice. He calls them by name and leads them out"*.

It is good to know that God is only a prayer away.

It never ceases to amaze me when God wants to reveal something to us how quickly he can bring thoughts to our minds. What I have just related happened in a few minutes. It has certainly taken me a lot longer to recall and write about it.

## Divine Healing

When expecting Lorna I went to a meeting where the guest speaker spoke about Divine Healing. As this lady began her speak, I in my mind said to God, “why did I never ask you to heal my leg,” and then said, “the problem wasn’t big enough, but I know God that you have the ability to do what you chose, I know if you wanted to you could take my leg off now and set it in the corner of the room.”

You see we had been involved in a car accident a few years before and as a result arthritis had set in. I was expecting Lorna and because of pain in my hip I could not sleep on that side, and because of heartburn I could not sleep on the other, hence the question about healing.

The meeting continued and I could not tell you a thing about it except that at the end the speaker said, there is someone here who requires healing for pain in their joints. I thought, oh, are you speaking about me, but realizing that many people suffer from arthritis, I felt that if I spoke and said it was me when in fact God was healing someone else who was too shy to speak, I could weaken some persons faith if my pain remained. But I came home and was able to sleep on that side again, for which I was very thankful. But I have got to say that I still have arthritis in my body.

I believe God certainly has the power to heal but on occasions as with St Paul when he asked for healing on three occasions God’s answer was no.

*2 Corinthians 12 v 7 to 9 To keep me from being conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”.*

# Chapter 11

## The Land Rover Accident

Before I tell you about an experience when Lorna was a child I want to let you know what happened when I was teaching Sunday- School on the previous two weeks. The lesson that I was to teach the children included a time when I was asked to share an experience of God's working in my own life. I told of our awareness of God's presence with us during the time of Alister's illness with meningitis and the children were so intrigued that on the following Sunday they asked me to tell them again of God's dealings with us through this experience. I told them that God knew all about every one of us and has a purpose and a plan for our lives. Now what I am going to tell you about Lorna happened on the following Tuesday.

When Lorna, our second youngest child was two and a half, she her brother had gone out after dinner to play in the sandpit, the rest of us were still sitting at the table when a farmer arrived in our farm yard with a trailer load of sheep. The sheep needed to be housed near where the children were playing but because our own land rover was parked in front of that door; one of our sons was asked to move the obstructing vehicle.

He got into the vehicle and looked behind him before he reversed but because the back window of the land rover was high and Lorna was small he didn't see her leave the sand and step out behind the vehicle. He didn't know that anything had happened until Alister began to shout, but too late, the back wheel had gone over Lorna. Our eldest son David ran out when he heard the commotion and picked her up and I can still see him carrying her into the house and laying her on the couch. She was just moaning. We immediately took her to the doctor who lived a few minutes away. The doctor told us later that she was very concerned because Lorna was moaning rather than crying.

We were sent to the hospital right away and although the track of the land rover wheel was across the back of Lorna's track suit top and the wheel skimmed off her face she didn't have a broken bone, only a little bruising and three tiny scars on her face which she has to this day, although now faint they are a reminder of the grace of God, we have so much to thank Him for.



## CHAPTER 12

### Supplementing our Income

In order to supplement our income Eric bought a lorry and transported sheep for many years to a factory in Roscommon, and as stated earlier, we also grew potatoes for sale. In the early days when the potatoes were being shipped abroad they were sold to a local merchant, but when that outlet ceased Eric tried to sell his produce through shops. This went reasonably well for a short time until one day a shopkeeper said they could get the potatoes cheaper elsewhere. Yet the retailer was getting almost as much per stone as we were getting for 4 stone. As a result we began to sell our produce from door to door around a neighbouring village. We also sold the potatoes from a trailer along the roadside.

One of our sons was in the process of making an advertisement sign when he came into the kitchen where I was baking and asked if I had a marker. Suddenly one of those thoughts that come to mind quicker than I believe it is possible to think it, I said, "Do you think anyone would want any of my home baking?" He replied cheekily, as sons do, "Who would want your old baking?" I said, "Right my boy, put home baking on that sign"! He did so and after erecting the sign the following day, a lady arrived and asked what could I make?

I recall my brain being in a whirl and I rined off a number of possibilities. You see I had never thought of doing this and I didn't know where to start. This lady gave me an order that day and said she would collect the baking on Saturday. A couple of days later Eric was due to distribute the potatoes on the usual route and I said, "I think I will send some baking with you". I made quite a variety of scones, cakes; tarts etc. and nothing came back. I doubled the amount the following week and again nothing came back, so I doubled the amount again.

I believe God enabled me to do this work when our two youngest children were only babies. Our eldest daughters helped with icing when they came from school every Friday evening. When I look back I wonder where I got the energy or the time because I now find it difficult to bake for our own family... This business continued for approximately seven years until I took pneumonia; I will tell you about the pneumonia later, but now because three of us were in hospital within six weeks of each other I will tell you about Eric and Alister first of all.

## Divine Intervention

Eric had to be hospitalized on three occasions with an eye problem. The third visit was due, so when I attended a church meeting in Letterkenny one night around that time, Eric was on my mind because I felt he was anxious about the outcome of the forthcoming operation.

At the close of the meeting we were offered a gift of what this lady called Promises, she had made water lilies from stiff paper and in the enclosed petals she had written a scripture verse. The promises were lovely, she told us she had one for everybody, but if anyone particularly wanted an additional one for someone else there might be a few extra. She said she hoped that these verses might be of help to those who received them. They may not mean much now she said but there may come a time when they would.

The surprising thing was that I picked up one for Eric first of all, and I didn't notice until later that his was pink. Eric's verse read, *The Lord who created you says; do not be afraid - I will save you. I have called you by name - you are mine, Isaiah 43 v 1.*

Could anything have been more suitable? This verse I am sure gave Eric strength and encouragement in his time of need. I was not to know how relevant mine was to become in a very short time.

## Strength Given in time of Need

Prior to Eric's hospitalisation, I was wondering how I was going to cope with having to do the baking, the door to door sales, mind the family and travel the two hours journey to Sligo to visit Eric in hospital.

I recall going with my mother and our youngest two children into the local graveyard to sympathize with a recently bereaved person who was visiting her relative's grave, as we were walking back towards the car, we passed an ancestral grave. It was covered with weeds and I felt compelled to do something about it. Because it was cold, I sent my mother back to the car with the children and I began to weed.

As I did so, the anxieties about how I was going to cope when Eric went to hospital came to mind; God also brought thoughts to my mind about the child I had lost almost seven years before, and there I shed tears. At that grave I left my entire life in God's hands that day and again peace was restored.

Eric had his operation in a few days time and I am thankful to say everything went very well with the operation, plus with my work schedule.

## Appendicitis

Not long after, both Amanda and Alister had stomach pain; Amanda had been having pain occasionally, now I thought they both had the same problem, but I soon realized Alister's pain was different. On examining him, I suspected appendicitis and after seeing the doctor, he was sent to hospital. There the doctors had divided opinions, but decided to admit him overnight.

I stayed with him and the following morning being Saturday, I knew Eric needed our car to do the door to door sales (it was before we got a van), I brought the car home and went back immediately with our eldest son to the hospital, to find Alister gowned ready for theatre. The operation was successfully done but we were told that his appendix was gangrenous and ready to burst.

I had been allowed to stay at night in the hospital with Alister, which was good, but when the hospital stay was over, that was another story.

## Chapter 15 Pneumonia

When Alister and I returned home, I wondered what was wrong with me. I thought I was taking M.E., I felt as if I was living on half power. I called the doctor on Sunday morning. After examining me she said, "You have pneumonia, I don't think it's too bad, if it was only the pneumonia I don't think I would send you to hospital but there is something else I am concerned about. I am going to take a blood test and, depending on the result, I will consider whether to send you to hospital or not".

When I stayed in the hospital ward with Alister other patients had pneumonia and I believe I picked up the virus. I could now see she was concerned; I had a bad cold sore and was experiencing strangeness in my head. I was sent to hospital that evening. On the way I realized I had forgotten my Bible, but I was delighted on entering the ward to see a Gideon Bible beside the bed.

Our minister in his preaching had been asking us to examine ourselves to see if there was sin in our lives and if our lives were as they should be before God. I had been doing just that and I felt that my life was like an open book before Him who is our Judge.

Now in that hospital bed I opened the Word of God not planning to read any particular passage and started to read Psalm 139, *“O Lord you have searched me and you know me, you know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways”*.

This reading spoke straight to my heart and I felt secure and at peace in Him. I don't think it is wise to just open the Bible at random and apply what we read to our situation in general, but I believe for me on that day it was God's Word into my heart He had indeed searched me and now I felt he had brought me to this time and he knew all about it.

When re-reading this Psalm again just now while writing, I was amazed at the relevance of the following verses: Verse 4, *“Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right hand will hold me fast”*.

Wow! How precious these words are now, knowing what I was later to experience. “Thank You Lord for your faithfulness, in holding me fast”.

During those first couple of days in hospital, my head felt very strange, I felt more comfortable sitting in the chair than lying in the bed. I remember not being able to sleep; I hardly slept at all from when I was admitted on Sunday until Thursday. That was when my Scripture Promise received at the meeting a short time before became so meaningful.

Isaiah 40 v 31, *“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint”*.

That was exactly how it was for me every day my strength was renewed.

I was getting medication for the pneumonia, but I really felt there was a problem with my head. At one point I put my hand to my head and I was reminded of Alister's head when he had the meningitis, with the plates apart and the soft areas bulged between. Now my head felt the same from above my ears to the top of my head. I must admit now as I write this, I am finding it very difficult and I realize one of the reasons why I have been reluctant to put pen to paper.

Could I have imagined it, you see this was very real to me, but no one else could understand what was going on. I did try to ask the doctor in charge of my case about my head and he just said, “don't you know you have pneumonia”. I felt a bit intimidated and didn't have the confidence to ask him to check further.

## The Jigsaw Puzzle

I cannot be sure if it was that night or the following, but I knew I was in the presence of God; His presence I could not physically see, but just as it is possible to sense the presence of another person when our eyes can't see them, I firmly believe God's loving presence was in that room. Remember, God in His Word tells us that, *God is Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth, John 4 v 24*. What I am going to share may surprise many as it did me, but what happened then is the reason I write this account. For me this was a most amazing, precious time. I know I could not have conjured up what took place on that night, as I had absolutely no idea that there was any link between the events concerned, they had occurred many years apart.

As I lay on that hospital bed, I believe the Holy Spirit said that He was going to show me something that most people do not see until they die. I saw a Jigsaw Puzzle, it was egg shaped, I don't recall seeing it as a clock but as I put the pieces in place I realized that was what it was. What I first saw was the picture shape, now I had to make the puzzle.

- The first piece sat at the top either side of 12 o'clock, reaching down almost to 9 o'clock, reaching to just after 12 o'clock. This piece represented Alister with his meningitis at two weeks old.
- The second piece I then had to place between 12 o'clock and 2 o'clock. This piece represented Alister with German measles, leading to me having the miscarriage.
- The third piece fitted between 2 o'clock and 4 o'clock filling in the centre of the puzzle. This represented Alister with the gangrenous appendix, when he was 10 years old.
- The next piece I lifted was Lorna's accident with the Land Rover, but I was told that this piece didn't fit in this puzzle.
- Then I asked, "How can I put this last piece in, and live?" I was told, "Put it in, it is the end of a chapter." This piece was me lying on that bed now with pneumonia. It completed the puzzle and fitted between 4 o'clock and 9.30.

What surprised me was that while all of the circumstances listed were difficult, God strengthened me through each one and I could now see they all fitted perfectly into God's Plan and completed this Jigsaw. I believe the reason I was supposed to write about this experience is so that other people going through trials or loss in their lives might be encouraged and learn to trust in God who said to the Israelites while in exile in Babylon and I believe He says to all who trust in Him, *Jeremiah 29 v 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

In Genesis chapters 37 to 50 we read Joseph's life story, there we are told of the great difficulties he endured but how after many years he could see God's purpose and understand how the pieces of HIS jigsaw fitted God's plan for him and his family. Many people may not live to see their finished jigsaw puzzle or understand the happenings in their lives but I believe God asks us to trust Him like the people of faith listed in Hebrews chapter 11, where it states in v 39 & 40 "*These were all commended for their*

*faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”*

## The Healing Hand of God

Because everything was so vivid in my mind at that time, I wrote nothing down about my experience, but I knew that I was supposed to write about what happened. I did tell a number of people, but there were areas that I found difficult to talk about and I kept putting it off until I could put it off no longer - but, that is now 16 years ago. After seeing this puzzle I heard what I believed was God saying he was going to do healing on my head.

What took place then was such an extraordinary event that I sometimes wondered could it really have happened, but it was so real for me; if this did not take place, then neither did any of the other experiences I have related. I believe that God said he was going to do healing on my head and He didn't need machines. It was as if the top of my head was opened and fork lightning shot down through and around inside my head.

I firmly believe that with God all things are possible. I know that afterwards when I put my hand to my head; it was hard where I believe it had been soft. Only eternity will reveal to me if there was in fact anything the matter with my head. A short time after being discharged from hospital that I heard on the radio about someone who had been left like a vegetable after an infection from a cold sore reached their brain. Apparently this can happen as a result of a person rubbing a cold sore and then rubbing their eye.

All I do know is that with St. Paul, I say, *“To Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen”*.

## A Time of Testing

Because this time was so special, powerful and intimate, I could do no other than share my experiences with the people I met in hospital, with the result that some people asked for prayer.

This was the case with a lady who had been moved into the empty bed in our ward. She told me she had been admitted into Coronary Care with chest pain, but tests did not reveal a heart condition. She told me a relative had been killed when something he had been working at collapsed and fell on top of him, and I remember wondering could there be a connection. She also said the staff in Coronary Care had told her that she was standing up on the bed in their ward at one point but this she could not recall. I remember thinking there is something more in this person's life.

At one point she said she was surprised to hear someone talk about God and His Word in such a personal way. During one night this lady suddenly sat bolt upright in her bed, I got the impression that something was wrong and I felt I should go over to her. I don't know why but I placed my hand on her forehead, she felt extremely cold. Suddenly she fell backwards in her bed and I remember the only time I ever saw something like that happen was on television when I saw a preacher during a Divine Healing service place his hand on a person and they fell in the same manner.

This lady then started to thank me, saying I was so good. I said no, if something had happened for her it was nothing to do with me. She then started to say I must have very good parents. I said yes, but it had nothing to do with them either. I said if she felt something good had happened for her, it was God's doing. Next morning she told me she had slept soundly for the first time in a long while and wanted to go to the Chapel to give thanks.

All was well until the following night - she left the room, I assumed to go to the toilet, suddenly the door opened slightly and where an atmosphere of peace and calm had been the most horrible, feeling of evil entered. This lady then came into the room, went to the side of her bed, knelt by her bedside for a few seconds, went to the window, pulled back the curtains, turned on and off the television repeatedly, went to the hand basin poured water into a glass, emptied it and repeated these processes over and over and over again.

The thought in my mind was Lord this is like the berries across the drain. I felt I didn't know how and hadn't the strength to deal with this situation. I quietly left the room and told the nurses what was happening but because they had heard me speak of my experiences, they thought there was something the matter with me. As I look back, I say poor nurses. Anyhow, they asked me to go back to the room with them and they would see what was happening. I did so but after a short time, this performance started all over again, but this time this patient took off her clothes and stood up on the bed. At this point I felt I needed to get out of there, so I went and sat up the corridor until the nurses came and said they had another bed in a single room. I went there and slept soundly until the morning.

Later that morning, suddenly I felt that same evil presence and when I looked through the door that was slightly ajar, I saw the same lady, and then heard her high pitched laughter in the corridor.

## Put on the Full Armour of God

All was well for me until that night as I was about to fall asleep - this same feeling of evil arrived yet again, it was as far removed from the presence of God as it is possible to be. Then I heard what I believe to be the voice of God say, "Get up, don't lie down when you are fighting". I immediately got out of bed and there in that single room I started to walk. The words of Ephesians 6 v 14-19 started to come to mind, I could not remember the words as they are written in scripture, but to start with I needed to put on the helmet.

- The helmet of salvation, I thought yes, Jesus Christ has died to save me and I have trusted in Him so I can put on this helmet.
- Then the breastplate of righteousness; I knew as Christians we were given Christ's righteousness when we trust in Him, and it was my desire to live right with Him and other people, so I could put that piece of armour on too.
- Next the belt of truth, I said, Lord Your Word is truth, and I try to live in obedience to Your Word in my life. I knew that Jesus also said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. John 14 v 6.* I also now know that in Ephesians 6 v 14 tells *us to stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled round your waist.* This is what I felt I was doing in Him.
- Now the shoes of the gospel of peace; I remember thanking God for His peace in my life and saying, Lord, You know that I try to live at peace with the people I meet and I try to take the Good News of Your Gospel of Peace to the people I meet.
- Then I lifted the shield of faith saying, You know Lord that I believe in You, You are my protector.
- Lastly my mind came to the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God. At this point, I sat down and opened my Bible that Eric had brought from home. I started to read in the Psalms as I had been doing earlier, I read through a couple, and then I came to Psalm 23:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,  
He makes me to lie down in green pastures,  
He leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;*



*Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

When I read these so familiar words, my heart soared and I started to praise God; I knew that He had made me to lie down and it is only now as I write this that I realized these were the words I had been given the day I was admitted to hospital, but they were from Psalm 139 v 3, *“You discern my going out and my lying down”*.

I have struggled with writing parts of this booklet; I felt opposition and I wondered if indeed I should include them, but I now see I can do no other than print the entire story because God has shown He was in my situation from the beginning to the end. God had indeed restored my soul and He had led me through the paths of righteousness for His names sake.

Now there in that hospital bed I read, *“Even though I walk through the valley of death I will fear no evil”*, I believed I had walked near death, but I had feared no evil for I knew that God was with me - now I started to praise God, and the presence of evil left. While earlier I had thought I was alone, I now knew that God was there all the time. He was the One who told me to get up and fight, He was the One who provided the armour. Indeed it was He who won the battle.

David the Psalmist who wrote the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm was thinking of the shepherds in Israel, in winter the shepherd keeps his sheep on the low-lands but in summer he takes them to the higher ground, in doing so they have to pass through the valley where there are wild animals that would by nature devour sheep, but unlike the shepherds in Ireland who generally drive their sheep, the shepherds in Israel go before the sheep in order to protect them from danger. This is a picture of how Jesus the Good Shepherds goes through the valley of the shadow of death before all who have put their trust in Him

After I had written this, I looked up the word fight in Scripture, to find that there are verses where God tells us to fight against wrong and for the faith but there are many more verses where He says He will fight for us His children. Thank you Lord.

The next day, Sunday, I remember feeling that I very much needed prayer support. There was a telephone in the room beside the bed and I tried to ring Eric; what I didn't know then was that this phone only took incoming calls. Then I realized he would be at Church at that time anyway, I recall it was Children's Day. I remember feeling entirely alone and felt I could not talk to anyone in the hospital as I felt they would not understand. I thought what must Jesus experience have been like when His disciples slept while He was in distress in the Garden of Gethsemane? It was at this point that I realized that while I had thought I was all alone, God had been with me all the time. I now gave thanks realizing that in a very minor way I could now begin to understand what it must have been like for our Saviour at the time of crucifixion, when God the Father had to turn away from His Son when He was bearing our sin in His body on the cross. My heart was filled with thanks and wonder at what He had endured on my behalf.

I felt that I needed someone who was a Christian to stay with me that night and Eric agreed to do so. I felt sorry for him because he wasn't long out of hospital himself, but I now felt physically and emotionally drained and I didn't feel I had the strength to cope on my own

should a similar experience occur. That night Eric was given a pillow and blankets for the armchair and we both settled down to sleep, when suddenly just as I was about to nod off – again that evil feeling returned. I informed Eric who was just asleep and he said yeah, yeah and went off to the toilet but when he returned, I explained what was going on with me and asked him to pray.

He began to pray a Spirit filled prayer and again the evil feeling left and we were able to praise God together.

## Victory in Jesus Christ

Next day I was discharged from hospital, it was so good to be home. But just as before, when I was about to sleep in my own bed the same thing happened, but this time, I shook myself and said to what I firmly believe was an evil spirit, “I am not going to go to sleep until you leave me alone. I have trusted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, I am His and you have no power over me”. Immediately that spirit left and never again returned. Praise God.

I now realize the wisdom of my loving Heavenly Father in instructing me to put on the whole armour of God.

*Ephesians 6 v 12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”.*

I also want to thank God for giving me the strength to do what I now know is advised in James 4 v 7: *Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and He will flee from you.*

## CHAPTER 16

### Making different Bread

Before hospitalization, I had been doing the home baking as you know, now God was telling me to give up the baking, I was to make bread of a different kind, I had no idea what that meant . While I was in hospital my sister-in-law did the baking to supply our customers, I had suggested previously that she should consider doing baking to sell in their shop, but I remember her saying that people didn’t buy a lot of cake and she didn’t think it would be worthwhile. Now she continued where I left off, she is a qualified cook whereas I was not.

As time went on she and my brother built a bakery and coffee shop and we continued to sell their high quality products to our customers while they also supplied their own and many outlets until they sold the bakery ten years on.

I believe the new bread I was to make was poetry. I remember writing a few lines of thanks there in the hospital and giving them to a nurse. Something I had never done before. I then recall walking across a field one day and words coming into my mind in rhyme. I wrote it down and read it to Eric, he then got a couple of verses and between us we finished the poem. We put a popular tune to it and we have sung it many times at Christian gatherings. The poem was called I'd Lived my Life, it went as follows.

## I'd Lived my Life

I'd lived my life for self in sin  
Until one day God called my name  
He said "I have a job for thee  
Take up thy cross and follow me".

I said to Him have thine own way  
And by my side for ever stay  
He came into my life that day  
And He took all my sins away.

Now my old heart was full of sin  
And only Christ could cleanse within  
His blood it washed me white as snow  
So now to heaven my soul will go.

Sing Hallelujah to our King  
Who died but rose triumphantly  
And now He sits upon the throne  
Will you make Him your very own?

Ask Jesus Christ into your heart  
Tell Him today you'll never part  
He gave His life for you and me  
Upon the Cross of Calvary.

## Inspiration when Burdened by Tragic News.

Some time after I was standing at the sink, which was nothing new, but what was new was that I didn't have the usual radio blaring. Now, there were words and music in my mind, I remember thinking what is that, I don't think that is something I know. I think I had better write it down. I did so immediately but the most exciting thing for me was I was able to go and play it on the piano, something I could not generally do. I can only play about two pieces of music without the notes in front of me.

Not long after we had a man come to paper our sitting room, I usually do all our own papering and painting, but not this time and I was just about to take him a cup of tea when on the news I heard of the tragic drowning of six men off our Donegal coastline. When I went to the sitting room with the tea, he said he was just about to come to the kitchen to make more paste, but now as I had the tea there, he would drink it.

I returned to the kitchen and I was burdened thinking about how quickly those men had gone into eternity and realized many people think they will have plenty of time to get right with God on their death bed.

Now again words came to mind and I started to write, by the time the workman had drunk his tea I had written a poem four verses in length. To say I was surprised was an understatement. You see, I knew nothing about poetry, never mind writing it. I can't remember any poetry I ever learned at school and I certainly was no student of English.

A short time later a relative had a major heart attack, we knew we would not be allowed to visit him in hospital, but I had some Christian literature that a sister-in-law collects for me and I share it with friends. I picked up a poem from the drawer that I thought might be helpful to him and the Holy Spirit said, "Give the one I gave you to write, that is what you got it for." I went immediately to the telephone and told the patient's wife what had happened and she said certainly she would take the poem to her husband. I firmly believe if I had not obeyed the prompting of God that day that I would not have received any more.

## More Food for Thought

Having taken food to the field where the men were working one day, I was walking back towards the gate - I now had six poems and I thought I must have written about everything.

To my surprise, again my mind started to roll, before I reached the gate I remember thinking, could I possibly have one hundred poems in the year. Before I reached the house the poem was finished, but what surprised me most was that I remembered it all and was able to write it down. On the night before the end of the year I was awakened with two poems to make the hundred. How great is our God.

I have got to say I am no literary genius but I believe God has enabled me to have three little booklets of poems printed, and I have many more not yet published. I have also written the life story of an Uncle who died a couple of years ago

I thank God that some people have been blessed through reading these books. The poems are read on Gospel Radio Shows quite regularly. For which I praise God.

## Renovations

We had renovations done to our home around that time and because workmen needed supplies, I went to a shop where I had never been before or since.

On my way home I was again in communion with God and I recall Him putting the thought in my mind that people needed to know He loved them and could give them the assurance of Eternal Life. I felt He was pointing in some way to me doing something, but I wasn't sure what. We already did supply homes in this area with our product sales.

Eric some time after took pleurisy and had to go to hospital and because he was the one who did the product deliveries I had to sit beside his hospital bed and write down names, giving me directions to go up this lane and down that lane in an area I knew little about and where I knew very few people. I am now glad to say I know many who I consider friends.

Again, I could see the hand of God at work. Some time after in a home that had been in my sight on the day when I believe God made me aware of the needs of people; I spent a wonderful time with two ladies sharing about God and His love for us. I had been about to leave that home, I recall it was near Christmas and they were wishing me a Happy Christmas. One asked, "Will you go out for a few drinks over the holiday season?" I recall saying, "No, I believe in being filled with the Spirit of God rather than the spirit of alcohol." She was surprised and said, "You don't often hear anyone speak like that" and I said "I will speak about the things of God all you like". I was invited back in to that home again and we spent I am sure at least an hour, talking about the things of God.

We talked about the reason we celebrate Christmas, how when Jesus was born, the angels told the shepherds, *"Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord, Luke 2 v 11.* We realized that most people celebrating Christmas either don't know or don't want to know that the reason Jesus came was to save people from their sins. I believe we had a worthwhile God appointed time together. The elderly lady was able to recall her mother having to go to the shed to read her bible.

## One of the Greatest Days of my Life

I also know that two elderly ladies found peace with God through reading the poems; if I was given them for no other reason, I would be very, very happy.

When I started to write, I was getting inspiration at all times and in all sorts of places. Quite a number of times when doing door to door sales, I would just have to pull the van into the side of the road and write.

At the beginning this was such a surprise to me that one day when I went to the home of my next customer, an elderly widow woman, I asked her would she like to hear what I had just written. She said, “yes”, so I read the poem. When I visited after that she would say, “Well, have you anything new to show me today?”

As I was leaving her one day she got very serious and said, “Sometimes I wonder if everything is all alright.” I knew what she meant but I wanted her to tell me, so I said, “What do you mean.” She replied, “Sometimes when I am on my own at night I wonder if anything happened to me, would everything be alright.” I said, “You can be sure that everything is all right.” Immediately she asked, “Can I?” I began to talk of how we were all sinners in God’s sight and her response was, “Don’t you know, I know I’m a sinner.”

I explained that because we are sinners we can’t save ourselves and that we need to trust in what Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God did for us on the cross, and how we need to ask him to save us.

I like to think of God as being like a perfect gentleman, He does not force His way into anyone’s life He waits to be invited in; He has given us the freedom to chose.

I told this lady that when we put our trust in Jesus asking God to forgive our sin and invite Him to take control of our lives God puts our name in the Lambs book of Life and no one can take our names out of that book.

I so clearly remember her say, “That would be wonderful sometime.” I said, “That sometime can be now if that is what you want, but I said, I am not asking you or telling you to do anything. Her response was, “don’t you know that’s what I want”.

I said I would pray with her and if she responded in sincerity to God He would make her His own. This we did, afterwards she gave a long contented sigh and said, “Now.”

We did not meet many more times because she died a short time after, but one day when I was leaving her she said, “I used to be afraid, but I’m not afraid any more.” Thank you Lord.

## **New Birth at Ninety Plus**

The other old lady was in her nineties. It had been in my mind to visit her for some time, and when I did she told me that although her son was with her at night, she often felt quite lonely. “But when I feel like that,” she said, “I start reading those books”, pointing to my poem books sitting near her.

She said, “When I start reading I always come on something that helps me”. As we began to talk about the things of God she too expressed her desire to be sure that when she died she would go to heaven.

When we began to talk about how we need to personally put our trust in Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross, she said. ”I am a teenager again.” She had worked with what the Bible calls born again Christians whom she said she dearly loved and recalled them telling her the very same things that she was now hearing again.

I explained how she needed to believe in Jesus, His death and resurrection and ask Him to come into her life, this she did and as we prayed the tears fell down her face. The thoughts she expressed were, “This is the most wonderful day of my life”.

What a joy, and what a privilege. I feel this is one of the greatest days of my life. I visited this lady a few days later and she told me she had gone to her church and she said it was Saturday not Sunday, she said she couldn't remember what the priest was talking about, but that everything that we had talked about came to her mind and everything fell into place, she went on to say the peace of God flowed through her. Praise You Lord.



## CHAPTER 19

### Happy Memories

I could just keep writing; there is more to tell about the many lovely visitors we have entertained or had to stay in our home from Holland, France, Poland, Switzerland, Jamaica, Hong Kong, Ghana, Canada, America, Australia, England, Scotland, Isle of Man and of course Ireland.

I can also recall many good times of laughter and fun or as we the Irish would say “crack”, we have enjoyed with so many people who have worked on our farm over the years. Thank you Lord for many good memories, it is lovely to meet some who call me Mammy.

There is much I could write about the wonderful holidays we have enjoyed, mostly inexpensive family times.

There is so much more I could say about my godly parents, to whom I owe so much.

I recall my father at the prayer meeting a week before he died, in his prayer saying, “What a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and grief’s to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.” Little did we realize that my mother would find him sitting dead on the living room settee one week later? My father was a kind, thoughtful, hard working, helpful person who was always thinking of others. He dearly loved children and children loved him.

My mother was also a kind, generous, helpful person, with a childlike faith in God and a contented outlook on life - sadly in her latter days she took dementia, she lived with us for two years prior to her death. We did all we could for her and we are thankful for her sake that her illness was not too prolonged.

Her illness made me realize how important it is to get to know the Lord and His Word when our minds are clear, none of us know when God will call or when we may get to the stage when we are not able to think clearly for ourselves. I am glad I had the privilege of being in her bedroom the night before she had to go to hospital, less than a week before she died, she was unaware that I was there and I heard her pray to God her Heavenly Father in such a trusting way.

## CHAPTER 20

### A New Lease of Life

Shortly before my father died, I received a call from a person in Northern Ireland who was looking for someone to become a distributor with an International, family run, Natural Health, Network Marketing Company. I could not have been more skeptical. I thought who is this person, this is probably another scam, and anyhow what do we know about interfering with people's health.

But I am thankful to God that I asked this man to call Eric the following day, and because Eric had a health issue he was concerned about; he questioned the caller about these products, products we had never heard of. As I mentioned earlier I also had health issues, and I must say I too am very grateful that we were introduced to this company and their unique products.

I am thankful to say that now, over nine years on, our health is so much better and because of this business we were able to hand the farm to our eldest son six years ago. He always had a great love for animals and a desire to carry on the family farm where he has now also developed a very impressive Trout Fishing Lake. We believe God answered our prayer before we asked; we thank him for supplying our need through this business. It has given us a new lease of life. It is great to be in a position to be able to help people both physically and financially.

I believe that Jesus was the first Net Worker, He chose twelve men, taught them and sent them out to share the Good News of the Gospel, and as a result Christianity has spread across the world. This is exactly how our business works.

We have made so many new friends from so many walks of life, and from so many parts not only of our own country, but of the world, and we have been enabled to do so much, and go to so many beautiful places we would not have had the opportunity to visit otherwise.

We have got to thank God for His loving care, protection and leading in the years that have passed and look to Him to guide and keep us in the days and years to come.

## My Prayer for the Future

O Jesus I have promised  
To serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou for ever near me,  
My Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
If Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

O let me feel Thee near me;  
The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me,  
Around me and within;  
But Jesus, draw Thou nearer,  
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear Thee speaking  
In accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion,  
The murmurs of self-will;  
O speak to reassure me,  
To hasten or control;  
O speak, and make me listen,  
Thou Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised,  
To all who follow Thee,  
That where Thou art in glory  
There shall Thy servant be;  
And, Jesus, I have promise  
To serve Thee to the end;  
O give me grace to follow,  
My Master and my Friend.

John Earnest Bode, 1816-74

# Conclusion

## My Relationship with God

It was almost with reluctance that I put pen to paper to write this booklet, but I knew that if I was to have peace with God I would have to comply with what I believed he has been prompting me to do for the past 16 years.

One of the reasons for my reluctance to write was because it is mainly about God and His relationship with me, and I didn't want anyone to imagine that I think of myself as being more important or special than anyone else. I want you, the reader, to know that I have to come back to God again and again in repentance confessing that I have not been as faithful or as consistent as I should be. I am always so amazed and thankful to God for His patience with me.

But, I did want to give my Heavenly Father the thanks, praise and glory due to Him for who He is and for all He has done or sought to do in my life thus far.

I wanted to acknowledge His love and mercy in reaching into my life as a child, leading me to trust in Him who has been my strength and guide. There have been many times of testing and trial, but I saw that God had a purpose and plan in allowing me to go through such times, teaching me to lean on Him and trust Him in every situation. I believe He also used such times to draw me closer in dependence to Him, guiding me in the way He wanted me to live my life.

I just pray the contents of this little booklet will be of help or encouragement to someone who is seeking the Lord or someone who is trying to live for Him in their own lives and that ultimately, He will get the glory.

If anyone would like to contact me they are very welcome to do so at our email address, [ericflp2001@hotmail.com](mailto:ericflp2001@hotmail.com),

Or by mail to Cloughfin, Rossnakill, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Ireland.

Please do read the appendix

## Appendix

### Come and See

#### “How great is Our God”

I can hardly believe what I have just read. I had completed what I hoped was the final proof reading and correction of this booklet prior to going to print, I hit a key on the computer and what do you know, something went wrong and messed up the print. I didn't know what to do; anyhow, I didn't have time to do anything about it, as it was time to go to our Prayer meeting / Bible study.

There, I was given the Information Pack for the 2007 / 2008 session of P.W.A (Presbyterian Woman's Association). You see I had been asked if I would act as President of the Link in Donegal for a term of three years I had written about that earlier in this booklet but decided to delete it, but now I was given this Information Pack, where it said,

COME AND SEE.....OUR AWSOME GOD.

When I arrived home I opened the pack to find that the devotional part of the programme was laid out as a JIGSAW.

For me this was God confirming that His timing is always perfect.

I had been asked some years before if I would become President but I declined as I felt I just did not have the time and I also wondered if I had the ability to take on this important task. But when asked this year I felt I should say yes, and believe it or not, I think this has been my busiest year so far.

I have spent this year trying not to concentrate on the next event until the previous one was sorted, but now the time had come to think seriously about P.W.A. and I believe God again confirmed that He is in control it by showing me this jigsaw in the Information Pack just as I am about to complete my booklet called The Jigsaw Puzzle.

I now sincerely ask for your prayers as I seek to carry out this task with God's help within the Woman's Work of our Church.