

Bill Subritzky presents

Miracle at Dubbo

By Pat Shepherd
As told to Vic Francis

Miracle at Dubbo
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ONE

Early Traumas

In life, there are those who survive and those who don't.

War, accidents, the loss of a loved one or a terminal illness bring out great depth in some people, yet completely overwhelm and crush others. Often it is those whom you least expect to survive who hang on, while those you expect to perform well, fall apart.

Generally I have survived - but I take no credit for that. God never let me go and I didn't know how to do anything else. I didn't know how to give up or how to die.

My survival owes a considerable amount to the toughness built into our family by pioneering grandparents, and a certain amount to my country upbringing on an orchard in Victoria, Australia. Our orchard backed on to virgin bush - summer bush fires were a constant danger and fear.

My older sister, younger brother and myself rode to school on the one horse, three miles to and from school each day. There were the occasional tumbles - when one of us began to slip sideways we all went too. One horse we rode was clever enough to move away from a handy fence to prevent us remounting. And so living near, and being dependent upon the land, instilled a certain tenacity in my character.

But it was mainly through my upbringing that I developed the independence which would ultimately see me through severe trauma, illness and rejection by God, man and family.

I felt I was the odd one out in my family. For a start, I didn't get on with my mother, who found it difficult to show affection to my father and even more so to us children. She was reserved and unencouraging; any approval she gave was based on successes and achievements, not because you were simply you and special because of it. I seldom seemed to achieve, so praise was rare indeed.

It obviously wasn't all her fault. My four brothers and sisters didn't have the same difficulty I had with Mother - perhaps they achieved more than I did.

But whatever the cause, I grew up afraid of my mother. Just how much was illustrated by an incident which occurred when a city school teacher came to our school and was horrified at us country kids eating raw mushrooms picked from the fields. He panicked, told us they were poisonous (we used to smell them to ascertain whether they were all right) and put the fear of death in my heart. But I was too scared to tell my mother for fear of retribution for being corrected by the teacher. So instead I crept home, took out the much-hated castor oil, and dosed myself up on that. I only felt safe a day or two later when it became obvious I hadn't been poisoned at all.

My father was a contrast to Mother - very affectionate, but always allowed my mother to have her way.

I remember times when he would put his arms around me or nurse me, but when we heard my mother's footsteps I would step away, knowing somehow in my childish understanding that it wouldn't be good to be seen in such a loving situation. Not only did mother have trouble giving affection - she also had trouble seeing others give it.

My main source of love came from my grandmother, who lived with my grandfather at the bottom of the hill.

She was a tiny woman with a huge Bible, which she would open to show me pictures and tell me stories of God. But, like my father when he was cuddling me, Grannie would lift me off her knee when she heard my mother's footsteps coming down the hill and put the Bible away. Grannie had had a very hard life. Granddad was an alcoholic, which was why they had moved to the country away from the hotels. Her only daughter lived in a convent, one of her sons had died, and then there was my father. She had also fostered several children.

As a result of these hardships, Grannie's whole life seemed wrapped up in her grandchildren.

But when I was about 7 years old my family moved a few miles away and we suddenly stopped visiting her.

Soon after she became ill - I now believe partly because of the desolation of our moving away - and she began to deteriorate. Eventually she was taken to hospital in the city and I was never to see her again. Meanwhile, Granddad came to live in a bungalow at the back of our house.

So my early years weren't all that bad, the fear of my mother being partly compensated for by the love of my father and, more particularly, my grandmother.

But when I was nine years old this somewhat uneasy balance was shattered in one dreadful, life-changing afternoon.

I was home sick from school, my mother was pregnant with her fifth child and not feeling the best, and Dad was away in the city - three factors which would turn out to be volatile.

It began when my aunty phoned, and as I watched and listened to my mother's end of the conversation I could sense the tension mounting. The news was devastating - Grannie had died.

And in my aunty's emotional state, distraught at the loss of her mother, she lashed out at my mother - blaming her for neglecting Grannie and telling her that my father had deteriorated since he married her.

My mother could never take criticism. She was one of nine children and had been brought up in the harsh wheat country - a combination which produced a tough woman indeed. By the time she got off the phone she was beside herself.

She abruptly told me that Grannie had died, and in an instant my world fell apart. It had never entered my head that anyone would die, and the first person I knew who died was the only person I loved and who loved me. Not to have her seemed like there was nothing worthwhile left in the world. It was just one big black pit.

I began to cry, gently at first, then more loudly and finally in great sobs. My mother, in her fury, couldn't handle such emotion. Her anger rose - and so did mine - and we began to argue until I burst out, "I wish you were dead and I wish Grannie was still alive."

There was a moment of stunned silence. We children never spoke to Mother like that. But the combination of being alone together, the trauma

of the news, my father being away and my mother's anger set off a dreadful sequence of events.

"Go to my room and wait there!" she said sternly. I waited and I waited. Fearful and disturbed and looking for comfort, I began to touch myself (as taught by my grandfather).

My mother walked in and saw me. She stared at me with such disgust and spoke so coldly, "You ugly, dirty little girl. Get out of my sight!" I wailed with remorse, "I'm sorry I said that about Granny, I'm sorry I'm bad, I'll be good, I promise." I came towards her sobbing. She hit me again and again. "Get away from me. I don't love you. I have never loved you since you were born. Why aren't you like the others? Go away! Go away!" she cried again, pushing me from her. "Go away and don't come back!"

I went away. I ran, I cried, I yelled, I somersaulted over the clods of earth between the trees and hit my head against their trunks in a desperate effort to make the physical pain override the emotional pain.

I had always believed I was loved. The desolation was complete. It left me suddenly without security, family and, most of all, love.

I don't know how long I wept in the orchard, trying to come to terms with life as it now would be. We couldn't pretend anymore. What my mother had said could never be reversed. She could apologise (she didn't), try to make amends, but her words had cut an indelible mark on my childish life.

Eventually, exhausted, I lay on the bare earth weeping. Then two boots appeared in front of me. I shuddered within and lay still, hoping he would go away. But he wouldn't, I knew that.

I looked up slowly, first seeing the boots, then his tatty trousers, the old black jacket, the well-worn pipe, the beard. It was my grandfather. He pulled me to my feet and took me into his dark, tobacco smelling bungalow. He had molested me many times over the years. This day he raped me.

I think he suddenly realised what he had done and quite savagely pushed me away, almost repeating my mother's words, "Get out and never come back!" he spoke angrily. "You're bad for me!"

Again I ran. Again I sought some relief for the mental, emotional and physical torment. Something, anything to overcome terror, complete breakdown.

My grandfather had problems. My mother had problems. And, in turn, I had problems too large for a child to cope with - or an adult for that matter.

It was sink or swim, live or die, physically and emotionally. I decided to live. I became a survivor that day, and in my own increasingly rebellious way I coped.

I ran from his bungalow into the bush, and there I made a decision, a pact with myself which would affect every area of my life. Raising my fist into the air, I declared: "Nobody is going to push me around anymore. Nobody is ever going to tell me what to do." From that moment I determined to control my own life. My raised fist symbolised a decision in my heart to shut out any authority other than my own, regardless of whose it was. This included my mother, grandfather, teachers - and, significantly, God. And God mercifully blocked out of my mind the traumas of that life-changing day.

It wasn't that God had ever done me any harm - but He had never done me any good either.

Our family went to church every Sunday, all prim and proper. But the only result of that seemed to be hate and perversion, and if this was so then I wasn't interested. As far as I was concerned God could forget me and I would forget Him and we would both be much better off.

And yet I was only a girl, and a mixed up girl at that, and despite my vow I remained terrified of hell.

I was bad, always bad. My mother had told me that. My grandfather had told me that. And my grandmother, the only one who told me different, was dead. So it must be true.

And bad people went to hell - my Catholic upbringing had taught me that much.

So my life took on a confused mixture of rebellion against authority on one hand, and yet desperation to gain approval and love - from God, man or whoever would offer it - on the other.

I even threw myself into the ritual of religion with a fervour born of desperation. I got a white dress for my confirmation and learned my catechism.

But God seemed an angry man, looking to punish, and Jesus was too holy and distant to notice me. I prayed to the saints, particularly St Jude, the patron of the hopeless cases. I wanted so much to be good, but I always knew I was bad. Hell had to be my end. I was in "hell" now, but I was terrified of the hell to come. Perhaps, I thought, as a last resort, if I did a special novena (a devotional act performed nine times in succession) I would finally become good. The nuns and priests told us that this discipline would surely provide us with the opportunity of confessing our sins before we died and thus be able to enter heaven. My novena was to attend mass and communion on the first Friday of the month for nine consecutive months. It was a long time, but I was a particularly bad sinner and a long period of purging seemed appropriate. It wasn't easy. At times I slept in or was sick, and so I had to begin all over again.

But at last, heart pounding furiously, I got to church for that ninth successive month. As I went up to take communion I was so excited I shook with anticipation. Finally I would be good. Finally God would accept me.

Never will I forget the hopelessness of that let down. Even as the wafer and wine were in my mouth I knew nothing had changed. I was as bad, as dirty, as useless, as I had ever been.

Who was God anyway? He was my mother's God, not mine. And both of them were continually disappointed with me.

In my heart I raised my fist again and cemented my nine-year-old vow not to be pushed around or ruled by anyone. Especially not by God.

TWO

Strange Illness

My mother had always told me never to wash my hair if I was feeling feverish.

That frosty night I had a temperature and we were due to go out. My mother's warning rang in my ears, but I didn't have to listen to her anymore. I was my own woman - by now married to David Shepherd and with two young daughters, Christine and Jan.

So I washed my hair, warmly wrapped up the girls, aged three and one, and drove across town.

I shivered all evening, and the next morning my throat was raw, my glands swollen and the fever had worsened.

I scolded myself for ignoring my mother's advice, and went off to the doctor, who diagnosed glandular fever and ordered me to stay in bed until the temperature went down.

But it didn't. One week passed, then two. After a while I had to send the children to my mother's place because I was unable to look after them. Three weeks, four, five then six passed before, mysteriously, I recovered almost as quickly as I had taken ill.

The doctor was as mystified as anyone. The illness hadn't been glandular fever, and it certainly wasn't caused by going out with wet hair on a cold night. But he couldn't diagnose it as anything else. I think he was as relieved as I was when it just went away.

But life is rarely simple. About 12 months later the strange illness recurred. I recognised it immediately - the weakness, the fatigue, the fever were the same.

And so began an irregular, 26-year cycle of reasonable health followed by mysterious illness.

In the beginning I would have a year, even two, between attacks - allowing me to live a full and essentially happy life. In fact, during those

times of remission I was never quite sure if I had imagined it all or if I had really been sick.

Gradually, however, the attacks became more frequent and longer. Eventually I became sick more often than I was well, and even during the "well" times a dull ache deep inside - an exhaustion and inability to function properly - became my constant companion.

In attacks, I would lie in bed for days on end, not caring what was happening about me. The tendons of my elbows and my fingers tightened so I could no longer straighten my arms or hands. I had recurring rashes on my face (the doctor suggested German measles, but three times in three years seemed preposterous). Then I got Raynaud's phenomenon whereby my fingers and toes began to whiten and ache. Arthritis and rheumatism took hold of every joint, causing swelling and agonising pain from my jaw to my ankles. I suffered severe chest pains and swollen glands.

The sickness became so bad that I would have to focus all my energy and resources inwards just to cope. By night time I couldn't walk, and could barely talk, only just being able to drag myself around on my tail. On a typical day I would get up, put on my dressing gown and sit in the family room to watch the children getting ready for school. As soon as they had gone I would return to bed.

Later in the morning I would struggle up again, put the washing on and go back to bed, trying to find the energy to actually hang up the washing. In the afternoon I would get up again, begin to prepare tea but be forced back to bed.

When the attacks got really bad I couldn't do even these small things. Most painful of all was not knowing just what was wrong with me. I could have handled a life-threatening disease, something I could fight against and receive treatment for. But not knowing what was wrong produced an indefinable degree of agony that sheer physical misery didn't.

I went from doctor to doctor, specialist to specialist. Their diagnoses varied from severe concern to disbelief in my symptoms. One doctor even told me to pull up my socks, stop being a neurotic housewife and go home to look after my husband and children.

But I wasn't putting it on. I was sick, very sick - and no one could tell me why. So mostly I just stayed at home, hoping something would happen.

I coped, never allowing anyone to see the real suffering, the physical pain and the torment of not knowing what was happening. I didn't know how not to cope. Not to cope meant you had to lean on someone else and, since my childhood, there had been no one else to go to. For me not coping was a negative thing. I desperately wished I could rely on someone else.

Despite my misery, I resolved to make my sick room as happy a place as possible, particularly for the girls. I encouraged them to flit in and out, and tried to keep tabs on their developing young lives.

I had seen sick people manipulate their families and I used to pray that I would never be like that, and that my sickroom would be a joyful and happy place.

But it was making the best of a bad job. My illness prevented me from being there when they most needed me - and I knew it. I remember one day lying immobile on my bed, vaguely aware of Christine and Jan playing on the road outside. I knew they shouldn't be there - even in our quiet street. But I didn't have the energy or the desire to call them back in. Right at that moment if they got hit by a car, I didn't really care. I felt like a failure - particularly as a wife and a mother.

THREE

Knowing God

Friends soon tire of chronic illness - particularly when it is undiagnosed. Before long the stream of visitors dried up, the telephone lay silent and we were back to cooking our own meals.

But I was never to be left alone - another set of friends and family was just around the corner.

My neighbour, Jeanette, belonged to a local church and she and the Christians in my neighbourhood began to pick up where the others left off.

I didn't welcome them. In fact, I did my best to discourage their arrival. I viewed Christians with deep suspicion, having by now embraced atheism. The atheist at my work, so handsome and persuasive, had shown me conclusively that my childhood belief in God was immature and unfounded. His arguments, coupled with my own experience of God being absent when I needed Him most, convinced me of the truth of his teaching.

The children were baptised Catholics - I was still too scared of my mother not to - but I stood resolutely in the church, fingers crossed behind my back, promising to bring them up in the faith I did not have. Yet, even as I uttered the words, I knew the awful truth, that I was not lying to the priest, but I was lying to God.

At times like this my childhood fear of hell resurfaced - but this only increased my resolve to blot out God completely. If I could eliminate God, I didn't have to believe in hell.

Anyway, God wanted to spoil my life, while I wanted to do what I wanted to do. My atheist friend was so free and untroubled - I wanted to be like that.

And so I began earnestly to study atheism until, gradually, even the small amount of faith in God that remained had ceased to exist. Jesus became a prophet, certainly not the Son of God, and everything to do with God was a fairytale.

Finally I was able to enjoy life without God being there to spoil it. I enjoyed partying with friends, drinking hard and regaling audiences with blue jokes.

With enthusiasm I mounted my soapbox and shared this freedom of life without guilt. No church. No rules. No God. Occasionally, I admit, an odd fear would hover in my subconscious, but I became adept at turning away from that and going on living.

But all the arguments in the world against God do not stand up when faced with the reality of the lives of people who have been changed by Him.

As my sickness dragged on and my friends and family began to drift away, I was faced day after day with a stream of people to whom God was not only a fact but a reality.

They came at me on two fronts - through the back door, led by Jeanette, with casseroles and other help to keep the household ticking over; and through the front door, Bible in hand, in the person of their minister, Colin Cohn. And they all prayed.

Colin Cohn was a short, stocky man who lived close by. He was very much into the holistic way of life, eating yoghurt and natural honey before it became trendy for health reasons. He always listened, and never pushed his views aggressively. He was discerning. He knew instinctively that it was no good talking to me directly about Jesus but instead supplied me with books about faith. He had a simple faith, almost childish in my estimation, and yet it was a strong faith which he didn't have to argue for or justify because it was so much a part of him. He was never rigid or dogmatic - you saw faith in him rather than in what he said. He was a man of great perseverance who walked closely with the Lord.

I met him when Christine started kindergarten at his church and I became secretary of the kindergarten committee. We got off to an inauspicious start when bees from his hives chased me when I visited his home, making me hide in a garage until they disappeared. This hardly endeared him to me, and I resolved to treat him civilly but coolly and suspiciously. Protestant clerics went against my Catholic upbringing and my newfound atheism.

One day, when Colin visited me on a committee matter, he asked me, as we walked together to the front gate, why I didn't send my child to Sunday School.

I replied, devastatingly I thought, that I was an atheist and that my children were both baptised Roman Catholics.

But his response shook me to the core. Instead of retreating, he smiled and said so kindly, "I don't care what you are, but I would like to see you come to a personal knowledge of God."

If he had turned away in disgust, or even argued Protestantism's superiority over Catholicism, I could have coped. But this love and refusal to be drawn into needless debate on nonessential issues was something I had never encountered before.

Nevertheless, I metaphorically placed my hands over my ears and ran - back into the parties, the drinking, in fact anything to blot out those disturbing words.

Jeanette was the other one whom I couldn't figure out or conquer. Her sister-in-law had emigrated from England and lived in the other half of the house we were in. We got on famously, enjoying the same sort of party-going life, and when we heard that Jeanette was coming over for a couple of years we resolved to welcome her with a full-scale, high-alcohol Aussie party.

What we didn't know was that Jeanette was a Christian. Her faith was fairly new, but it was deep. I got along with her all right, but I couldn't help thinking she would be much better if she lightened up and had a drink and cigarette in her hand.

Like Colin, Jeanette didn't witness overtly, but we had long discussions about God and, I realised later, that was her way of sharing her faith. We found it hard to cope with Jeanette. To us, God didn't matter at all. In fact, He was downright annoying because the bells from a church nearby rang so loudly every Sunday morning that they invariably woke us up as we tried to sleep off the effects of the previous night's party. But there was something indefinable about Jeanette which attracted me to her - it was a fairness, a security, a contentment with herself. They were all qualities which I didn't have.

I could blow all Jeanette's arguments for Christianity out the window with my atheistic logic, but I couldn't touch that indefinable strength within. Despite my best efforts, I couldn't disturb her faith in God, a part of her which seemed unmoved by the ups and downs of life.

Although I was 28 years old, and had a long history of church attendance, I had never seen or read a Bible. I had heard selected readings at Sunday mass, but that was all. During the 1930s and 1940s Catholics were actively discouraged from reading the Bible themselves. After all, the Pope was infallible in matters of faith, and the church alone was able to interpret the Scriptures. Protestants had done so to their cost.

Colin patiently ignored my sneers, and answered my baited questions by quoting the Bible. I recognised in him, and in Jeanette and the other Christians, an 'x' factor -something indefinable, but something I knew I wanted.

One day I was so frustrated at his unruffled, unhurried and absolutely certain approach that I threw his Bible across the room at him and told him to "Get yourself and your bloody book out of here." He did leave, but he was back a day or two later.

God gave Colin Cohn incredible wisdom. If he had said I needed to ask Jesus into my heart to forgive my sins I would have laughed him out of the house. I no longer felt sinful, nor did I reckon I needed forgiveness any more.

Instead he gave me books - first a Bible, which I found uninteresting and irrelevant (though I did surreptitiously read it); then a book which did have an impact - a copy of John Wesley's journal.

It was a strange book to give an atheist, yet I was fascinated by it and found it impossible to put down. I was intrigued by Wesley, a minister who got up and prayed each morning, who visited prisons, who went to the United States as a missionary, and yet did not have a real relationship with God.

On his return from the United States, his ship got into a severe storm and he became afraid. When he saw a group of Moravian missionaries praising God in attitudes of complete peace, he knew he did not know God as they did.

Back in England, Wesley visited the Moravians' church and as they were studying Luther's preface to Romans he records: "My heart was strangely warmed." At that instant he was converted to true Christianity and thus began one of the greatest of Christian lives as he preached the length and breadth of England. Wesley's story brought stirrings of hope deep within me. I, too, had known a certain religiosity without knowing God. I, too, had tried exceedingly hard to get close to God without achieving it. Maybe, the thought began to flower, I, too, could find God yet.

I now recognised the 'x' factor I had seen in these new church friends. It was the Holy Spirit, and it suddenly began to make sense to me. Denominations were not the answer, theology not the hope. If God was God, He could touch people regardless of race, creed or sex. He had to be beyond manmade rules and traditions. As I read I wanted to read more - and more. I became obsessed with the need to know if God existed. Nothing else mattered. I remember lying in my sickbed thinking that I didn't care whether or not I got well, but I had to know if God existed. If God was God, being just and fair to all, maybe even I had a chance.

Eventually it became all too much. Steeped in atheism on one hand, but desperate for a living God on the other, I prayed with yearning heart: "God, if You are there, reveal Yourself to me." It was painfully simple, yet profoundly deep.

Some days later, Colin, his wife and Jeanette asked if they could pray a 'healing prayer' over me.

I let them, figuring it couldn't do any harm. And as they prayed something indescribable happened in my life. Like Wesley, my heart was strangely warmed. One moment I didn't know God and then, suddenly, God knew me. I felt a sensation in my body like the first flutter of a child moving in the womb, and I knew my spiritual rebirth had taken place. God knew my name, He knew I was lying there. I had a sense of joy, of wanting to laugh, of lightness and love.

I still didn't know a thing about Christ, but I was born again of the Spirit of God. Physically, I was as sick as ever. Spiritually, I was instantaneously and completely healed.

FOUR

Condition Diagnosed

The lightness and freedom which my conversion produced has never left me - even through the dark days which still lay ahead. To be so far from God, so disdainful, so mocking, and then to discover His glorious reality, radically changed me.

I went from being totally against God to being totally for Him. The black, ugly outer shell of my body split and crumpled at His feet. I experienced the forgiveness of my sin, known and unknown, and had the inexpressible peace of knowing Jesus, not as a prophet or even as a good man, but as my Saviour and as the Son of God. The same Bible which had been so irrelevant became like a personal letter to me.

But there is far more to the Christian life than a conversion experience. A new Christian requires careful guidance and direction until he or she can be well-rooted in the faith. If this is lacking the way is open to deception.

Despite my church upbringing, I had no foundation to my faith and only believed the parts of the Bible which I wanted to believe. Because a measure of healing - spiritual, emotional and physical - had taken place in my life, I felt I had all the answers and saw no need to study the Scriptures or hear what God was really saying. Such circumstantial faith is dangerous, and before long I was slipping backwards.

At this time serious problems began to affect my marriage and I was introduced to the world of the occult.

That first spiritualist meeting seemed all right. The Bible was open in the middle of the table and the group sang hymns to keep the bad spirits away.

From then on I regularly attended such meetings, until one night I felt myself drifting... I don't know where. I was aware of the others but was far from them, and suddenly a loud voice erupted from my mouth and I became what is known as a trance medium. That was the opening of the door to palmistry, clairvoyance, automatic writing and all the counterfeit spiritual gifts. I became increasingly oppressed and was often afraid. Once I was overtaken with a desire to blaspheme and curse God.

I found powerful justification for what I was doing. The different spirit guides speaking through me were 'good' spirits - our open Bible and hymns testified to that. But it was wrong. It was destructive. And it was anti-Christian.

The Lord never left me, despite my latest rebellion. Instead, He let me get desperate, and one day He led me to pray, "God, get me out of this whole situation, despite me. I give You permission to do anything You wish, even if I fight against You."

He did just that. I became depressed, oppressed and suicidal. Then, idly leafing through the Bible one afternoon, I read of Jesus asking the disciples, "Will you also leave Me?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Only You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:66-69).

The words penetrated the evil and reached my very heart. There was nowhere else to go - and that day Jesus became my Lord, not just my Saviour. He brought me to a place of accepting the Bible - all of it - as His Word. I prayed the prayer He gave me, "Lord, from this day forth I accept this book (the Bible) as Your literal word of truth. Anything I cannot understand is because I am not yet spiritually mature enough to do so."

Yet the spirits of the occult weren't ready to let me go so easily. I would wake in the night surrounded by leering, ugly faces and hear the voices of the spirits which had spoken through me. I would quickly turn on the lights, then call on the name of Jesus until they left. Often I would also sense the familiar trance feeling taking over, and could only prevent myself going under by crying out to the Lord.

The spiritual battle also affected my family, especially my younger daughter, who had the recurring urge to walk into the path of speeding cars.

I was appalled when I read that the things I had done were an abomination to the Lord. I had chosen to be guided by Satan through the occult, rather than Jesus through the Bible.

Yet the Lord was there. He never left me. He held back the power of the occult until I was with strong and experienced Christians who could pray authoritatively with me. Then He would allow the spirits to manifest and through those present He delivered me and my family.

Over a time I renounced every aspect of spiritism in which I had been involved and received deliverance for myself and my family. Finally, I was set free to serve Him.

Because of my testimony, I was given opportunities to speak. I organised women's Bible studies and prayer groups; and I studied extramurally at Moore College in New South Wales.

But sickness still dogged my body.

Even in the times of remission, I was never well. When I was actually sick I was bedridden, and was hospitalised seven times in all.

The sickness gripped my body more tightly each time it hit. On one occasion I spent eight months in bed, unable to function, unable even to watch television.

That eight-month stint ended with one of the few amusing events of that nightmarish period of my life. On the first day of my recovery I went out to sample the world again, only to come back and find our house had been burgled. A picture came to mind of the poor burglar waiting outside my house for eight months for me to go out so he could do us over. I had to chuckle.

By now attacks were preceded by vomiting every time I tried to eat, while even venturing out into the sun exacerbated my condition. This prevented one of my great loves - going to the beach. If I took the children to the beach I had to dress in slacks and long sleeves and sit under an umbrella or in the shade of the ti-tree while all the bikini-clad beauties paraded before me. I had to smile at the curious faces of those trying to look as if they weren't looking at me. But all this embarrassed the kids terribly, so we seldom went anymore.

The sickness also made me unreliable - as a wife and mother, and as a woman increasingly involved in Christian ministry.

On countless occasions David went to major family functions, such as one of the girls' 21st birthday party, on his own while I stayed at home. He travelled overseas on business and I stayed behind. He went out to dinner with friends while I remained in bed.

I had to cancel speaking appointments, some of which were made five months in advance. When an attack came, I didn't know how long it would last, so I just had to clear my diary and wait.

But although there was great despair and hopelessness on each occasion, God did give me pockets of hope.

Each time I was in hospital He seemed to give me someone I could share His love with. Once it was a lady dying with cancer she died before I left hospital, but not before she met Jesus and lost her fear of death. Once it was a cleaner whose husband had left her; another time a nurse who used to come and talk about God and faith after she had finished her shift (she became a Christian and is still a good friend); yet another, a woman with a serious heart condition who couldn't understand why I had God's peace. It was like the Lord was saying to me, "I am here with you. I am still blessing you and those I bring to you." I found this a great comfort.

But by now I was afraid to go to doctors. Too many had prodded and poked me; too many had insinuated and announced outright that I was neurotic; too many had had wrong diagnoses. One doctor had even seen my Bible and ranted that my problem was caused by that. I just couldn't bear to see another shake of the head or frown on the brow, or to hear another mystified cluck of the tongue.

One day a friend told me of the help she had received after visiting a naturopath. Desperate but doubtful. I went to see him. It was worth a go. After various tests, he told me I was a very sick woman. I could have hugged him. What a change for a medical person to really believe I was sick and not just neurotic.

But his treatment, while easing some of the symptoms, was far from a cure. In fact my arthritis became increasingly painful while I was with him.

While the naturopath was treating me, we bought a new house in another area and I asked the minister of our new church if he would pray and anoint me with oil. Rather hesitatingly he agreed - and I promptly became even more ill - making him rather nervous of such prayers again!

This deterioration alarmed my naturopath so much that he sent me to a gynecologist, who in turn sent me to a diagnostician. This man was away on holiday and so I couldn't see him for three weeks.

I wondered wearily whether I would live that long. But I did make it, only just, and finally, nine years after my first attack, he diagnosed my condition as being systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

In an odd way that minister's prayers had been answered - not by healing but by a chain of events which at last sparked the diagnosis.

The symptoms of SLE, taken from a medical leaflet, read like a précis of my life for the past nine years: "Common symptoms are generalised aching, weakness, malaise, fatigue, low-grade fever and chills. Arthritic-like pains, joint swelling and stiffness often develop. Many sufferers are extremely sensitive to sunlight and even minimum exposure to the bright sun can trigger symptoms such as fever or generalised skin rash."

SLE is an inflammatory disease of the blood vessels in the connective tissue which bind the body's cells together. The disease can change these tissues, thus producing abnormalities in the structure and function of such vital organs as the kidneys, heart and brain. In addition, alterations may occur in the skin, the joints, the blood, the gastrointestinal tract and the nervous system. Moreover, it turns the immune system against the body's own cells.

In other words, I had become allergic to myself.

FIVE

Cortisone

Knowing the nature of my disease offered hope. Sure it was incurable, but in 1965 scientific advances suggested it could be manageable and that I might still live a normal life.

I immediately began treatment with cortisone - a relatively new steroid drug, the full side-effects of which were unknown at that time.

The cortisone immediately eased the arthritis, the taut tendons and some of the more severe effects of the disease, although it never took them away completely.

So followed 17 years of flare-up, remission, flare-up, remission. A virus, a tooth extraction, an operation, or any physical stress brought on an attack which required extra cortisone.

And, despite the cortisone, each remission seemed shorter and each attack seemed longer and more severe.

At times I was hospitalised for cortisone treatment, then sent home to wait, hopefully, for slow healing or, perhaps, death. I never knew if an attack would last two weeks, two months, or if it would ever end.

I had never before realised how much we need a point to live to - some spark of hope on the horizon. For me, becoming sick, with all its dread and fear from past episodes, was bad enough. But not knowing how long it would last, or if it would ever go away, left an empty, hopeless feeling. I had completely lost control of my life. Then a sinister new arrival added further complications-as well as the SLE, I began getting side-effects from the cortisone.

It was such a new and hopeful drug when I first began taking it that no one was particularly worried what other effects it might have. Surely any side-effects would be minimal compared with that of the debilitating SLE.

But I quickly began to hate cortisone as much as I hated lupus. Cortisone treatment meant I contracted diabetes and glaucoma. But worse still, it made me ugly. My weight soared (I went from size 12

clothes to size 16 or 18, and couldn't wear anything with a waist). I became moonfaced and red. My body was shaped like a pear, yet my legs were like matchsticks as my muscles wasted. I stopped looking in the mirror - it was too distressing.

My skin became extremely fragile and bruised continually. Supermarkets and crowded places became sources of fear and danger: jutting edges, a person stopping unexpectedly in front of me, or even scratching an itch, could leave me with great welts and sores on my legs.

I wore boots wherever I went, but you can't be protected all the time and one day, as I got off my bed, my book fell down, glanced against my leg and sliced it open. I had stitches in the wound, but it took weeks to heal. Then, when it was almost better, I bumped a door and opened the wound again. I still carry scars from these wounds.

Ironically, with my fat and rosy cheeks I often looked too well for outsiders to know how sick I was.

During one flare-up, a close friend offered to take me to hospital as my husband was away. She was slightly built and of pale complexion and when we arrived at hospital the nurse directed me to a chair at the back and tried to admit her instead.

On another occasion, a distant relative who was a farmer looked me up and down and pronounced me "as fit as a Mallee bull." (Mallee bulls are the toughest of animals because they are farmed in a part of Victoria where there is little food).

Such incidents made my condition doubly difficult. For those who did not understand my sickness, my looks confused them further.

Yet while some looked on with a certain amount of disbelief, my family were marvellous throughout.

The girls matured quickly - they had to - and at times took over the running of the house when I was too sick to function.

They had to get used to many different housekeepers and the continual uncertainty of whether I would be sick, or even in hospital, when they arrived home from school. If I was in hospital there was always the real prospect that I would never come home again. Both girls developed their own faith during these years and survived well.

David, too, was marvellous. He came from the old school where men did little around the home. He didn't even carve the meat. But when I was sick he adapted and got in boots and all, cooking and cleaning where he had to. He was happy to do it, but even happier to hand it back to me when I was in remission.

I hated it when people fussed and told me what a poor thing I was. I hated people telling me that they didn't know how I coped. For goodness sake, I didn't know how not to cope! I hadn't even cried since that incident when I was nine!

But David never fussed. He never made me feel a financial burden. He was patient, loving and kind. Nothing was too much trouble for him when I was sick. When an attack was coming on he didn't seem fazed or ruffled. He never said, "Oh no, not again." He never cast doubts upon my sanity.

In fact, there were times when I found him too even-tempered; times when I didn't want to survive on my own any more, when I wished David would takeover and tell me when to go to the doctor or to hospital instead of me having to tell him. At those times I longed for someone to understand just how really ill I was.

But I believe David was God's choice for me and I am grateful to him. As the years went by, I became more and more sick. It became hard to know which ailments were caused by SLE and which were caused by cortisone. Both resulted in deep depression and mood swings - and both were literally killing me.

Desperation led me to try various alternative medicines. One was homoeopathy, which helped to some degree; another was visiting controversial cancer therapist, Milan Brych, who had been exiled from New Zealand and was treating patients in the Cook Islands.

I went to see him at the suggestion of a Christian doctor in Melbourne who had prayed and felt that I should go.

I found Dr Brych a strange mixture of compassion and arrogance.

He was tremendously compassionate with his patients - I saw him sit up all night with a dying man to nurse him through his pain. But he was also

incredibly arrogant in the way he stage-managed his therapy, using one group of devoted patients to sing his praises to another.

I went to the Cook Islands with great hopes that his treatment would be effective for me. My praying doctor in Melbourne seemed so sure, and there was no doubt that there were some wonderful testimonies from people who had been helped by his treatment.

Dr Brych began giving me injections and wanted me to go off cortisone immediately. But I couldn't. I suffered serious withdrawal symptoms and had to return to my medication.

In all I spent three weeks in the Cook islands and gradually my hopes for a cure faded. I knew his treatment wasn't working, and even though I continued the medicine when I returned to Melbourne, my hopes had already been dashed.

That treatment finished abruptly when my Christian doctor, who was giving Dr Brych's drugs in Melbourne, was killed in a plane crash, taking with him my source of supply.

Somehow, such an ending seemed typical.

SIX

Renouncing the Vow

I didn't blame God for my illness - there seemed to be no reason why I should. People would ask me, "Why you?" and I simply said, "Why not?"

It seemed to me that I lived at the end point of generations and generations who had lived in rebellion to God, and I saw sickness as a result of people ignoring God's ways and rules. It was just one of those things. I lived in a fallen world, so why not me? At least, I reasoned, I had a relationship with Jesus, so I was better off than most.

I never felt my sickness in any way negated my faith. I firmly believed that God wanted my best, and I lived by that conviction. God is perfect in every way; therefore I knew He desired my best, despite what I saw, experienced and felt.

With that in mind, I was prepared to accept my sickness and give thanks in all things. My two major prayers were:

"Lord, I believe You desire my best and love me. I trust You, despite what is happening, and need Your grace to get through the day.

"Lord, You made this day, You made me in it. Fulfill Your purpose today in me, even if I don't understand what it is."

There were days when I was down and days when I was angry because God seemed unfair or to be pushing me through more than I could cope with. But despite this, there was always the underlying fact that He was there. Knowing that, I couldn't blame Him.

The occasions when I was down and desperate for healing and relief were most pronounced at times of great stress or disappointment - when I missed yet another dinner engagement or had to cancel another speaking appointment, or when the children went off unsupervised.

Occasionally I would be angry with God, hitting the wall with my fists as I demanded to know what else He wanted from me and why He was punishing me. He was the great healer. He had made me and He could remake me. Everything was possible with God.

I was content to accept my sickness - but there were those times when I longed for that special healing touch.

I was prayed for many times over the years, but although I did get some relief from the symptoms, the disease was never tamed. Prayer didn't seem to work anymore than medicine. I was faithful, obedient and believing, and yet the healing never flowed.

God often encouraged me during those times, however, and on one occasion He impressed on me Psalm 118, which I came to call my hospital Psalm. When I was on top I believed verses 17 and 18. "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death." When I was down, I doubt if I believed anything.

During one of these down times - increasingly frustrated at God, myself and my family - I decided to disappear for a day or two. I said nothing, got into the car and drove off. Ours is a very short street and before I reached the end I ran out of petrol. I walked back home and the family hadn't even realised I was gone. I believe the Lord laughed with me that day.

One day, though, I was dying. This attack was worse than any other, so severe that I could feel the life literally ebbing out of my body. I had been to hospital and they had sent me home. There was nothing more they could do.

I could no longer rely on the medical profession. No drugs, not even excessive doses of cortisone, could help me now. Nor could I any longer count on hidden reservoirs of inner strength, stubbornness and survival. This was it. The miserable end.

I wouldn't call it desperation exactly - I was too sick to be desperate - but it seemed appropriate that I should make one last attempt at prayer, and so I called up the elders of the church and asked them to anoint me with oil and pray for healing.

This had, of course, happened many times before without result. But this time it was different. Somehow the half dozen people gathered around my bed were imbued with a gift of faith. Instead of tentatively asking God to heal me, they began to pray with authority and it was as if they couldn't help but expect and believe for my healing. There was a

confidence, an assurance, a certainty that God was there and that He was there to heal.

And He did heal me - for a time. The waves of death gradually passed and I returned to normal, or what was normal for me. I had been on the brink of the precipice and God hauled me back out of the very jaws of death. It was just a hint of what He could, and would, achieve in my life. In 1982, during a period of remission, I suffered a shattering series of rejections.

My early life had been one big rejection, and the emotional scars remained deep within long after I had pushed aside the cutting words and the physical abuse. Now, even in middle age, when I was rejected, neglected or overlooked, my childhood insecurities came flooding back as a festering wound.

On this occasion, the rejection came three times in a weekend from people with whom I felt secure. And I couldn't cope. Gone was the tough survivor. Gone was the crusty outer shell. Inside, I was still as brittle and tender as a nine-year-old girl and the rejection was like a knife plunged into my heart and then turned around for good measure.

I hated myself, I hated the rejection. I hated my reaction to the rejection. I hated my sickness. I hated the way I looked. I hated my failure. And, as only a completely desperate person can do, I cried out to the Lord.

David agreed to me going away on my own for a few days and I determined to stay there until the Lord freed me from this bondage. I suddenly realised that there had always been a barrier between us that I could not break through.

As I prayed one night, Satan attacked me. My rebellion, my spiritism, my pride all came into focus and the devil threw every one against me. At times the battle was performed in prayer alone, but at other times Satan attacked me physically. It was as though I was being pummelled all over my back and all the time I was crying out in anguish to God and little by little I remembered everything!

And then the key to unlocking my bound life came into focus, clearly and miraculously. I was once again a frightened nine-year-old girl in the bush, holding my fist up at the world (and God) and saying, "Nobody is ever going to tell me what to do."

I saw that my vow had played into Satan's hands and made me a prisoner to demonic influence.

Alone and frightened, I renounced it: "God, from this day on I am going to do what You tell me to do. I give You full permission."

It was as simple, ultimately, as that. The Lord turned that key to the locked door of my heart and set me free. His presence was all about me and instantly an indescribable peace filled my whole being. I knew, finally, I had come home to my Father. He gave me a new tongue as part of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and I praised Him in my new language - the words tumbling out in a torrent. I felt I was with all the saints in heaven and all the saints on earth and we were praising God together.

A few months later I felt God was telling me He was going to heal me and He seemed to be impressing upon me the need to call some friends for more prayer and anointing with oil.

This time, as they prayed, I was healed. There were no flashes of lightning and, because I was in remission at that time, no physical evidence of healing.

But I was healed of systemic lupus erythematosus - the disease which had held me in bondage for 26 years - in an instant.

SEVEN

Reconciliation

At last I was alive. Instead of using all my energy just to survive SLE, I was filled with new physical strength - now having to cope only with my cortisone dependency.

Coupled with this was a completely new exhilaration in my relationship with God as I opened myself to His Spirit.

Until then I had basically rejected what are known as the gifts of the Spirit, mainly because I had been so involved in all the satanic counterfeit gifts during my time as a medium. Clairvoyance is the counterfeit of the word of knowledge, while guide spirits speak counterfeit words of wisdom. I had spoken in other languages while I was involved in spiritualism, so I didn't even want to know about the gift of tongues. Satan, the robber and thief, had spoiled my desire for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

However, God is greater than Satan. When He gave me the gift of tongues I realised immediately that it was completely different from the devil's counterfeit. I could never control my satanic tongues - they controlled me. But I found I could use God's tongue whenever I wanted to - I controlled its use, it didn't control me. Another difference between God's gifts and their satanic counterfeits was that the occult gifts invariably glorify the one using them, while the gifts of the Holy Spirit do not belong to the recipient but all the glory and the power belongs to God. They are used to edify God's people, not the individual; they bring us to our knees in praise and adoration of God. They are ministered in daylight and in church light, so unlike the darkness required in the occultic form.

There is great freedom in surrendering to the control of the Holy Spirit - "And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Corinthians 3:17). Once I saw the difference between God's gifts and Satan's, my hesitation evaporated and I began praying to receive every gift He wanted me to have.

My healing also led to a healing of my relationship with my mother and my grandfather.

Through the years, I had never been able to get close to Mother. I always felt she disapproved of my sickness and lack of achievements and I sensed her rejection of me.

Somehow I knew that there was no certainty of any love from anyone. I was always terrified that anyone who loved me or liked me would eventually say, "I don't really love you. It wasn't true."

I even feared the day when my children would hate me or turn away. No one could keep loving me because I was bad. In time they would wake up and cease to love me. So, too, would God.

Christmas was nearing one year and I counted off the days until Mother would go to my sister's house for six weeks for the holiday break.

But just before I was due to take her to the station to send her off, she tripped in her house, fell down the stairs and broke her arm. Instead of getting rid of her, I had to look after her - and I was angry with her for that.

During this time I had to go and see my pastor about a Sunday School matter and in the course of conversation I told him about what had happened. He didn't say it in as many words, but he inferred that I was being sinful by not honouring and loving my mother.

This upset me even more. I could cope with most things, but I could not cope with living in sin. I had always thought living in sin was a pleasant thing, but I realised as I contemplated my thoughts about my mother, that it was only a continual state of disobeying the commandments of God.

I knew this couldn't continue. All I had that mattered was Jesus. If I lost my relationship with Him I would have nothing at all. "How do you love and honour someone you don't love and honour?" I prayed desperately. "You can't make yourself."

The Lord replied, quite clearly, "Why do you honour Me?"

"Because You gave me life, Lord."

"I used your mother and father as a source of your life," the answer came back.

"Why else do you honour Me?"

"Because You provide for me."

"If your mother hadn't provided for you, you wouldn't be alive now."

Fair enough. I could see, instantly, that I could honour and respect my mother because God had created her, she was the source of my life and she had provided for me.

But loving was another matter.

Each day in my time with the Lord I began to speak out that which I didn't really believe: "Mum, in Jesus' name, because you are the source of life for me and because God created you and loved you, for His sake I love you."

Days and weeks went by and I repeated and repeated and repeated this confession which was really a prayer.

And as the days passed I found something happening in my heart. I was changing. The prayer was being answered.

Six weeks later my mother and I were discussing a hospital visit and she offered to pay for some petrol.

"Don't worry," I said. And then, despite myself, I added, "Mum, I haven't been the best of daughters and I'm sorry." Then I bent over and kissed her on the top of the head and said, "I love you."

I walked outside and got into the car and cried and cried and cried. Something had broken in my life. The hardness in my heart melted away.

I was able to forgive my grandfather, too, suddenly understanding how people behaved out of their own emotional turmoil and their own past and their own sense of failure. Granddad was dead by then, which helped I suppose. But that forgiveness of him and my mother brought a different sort of healing to my life.

Then disaster struck.

Two years after being healed of SLE my body broke down. I was admitted to hospital and put on antidepressants - years of high doses of cortisone had finally taken their toll.

It was so difficult to accept this illness after receiving such a miraculous healing from God. I was ashamed, somehow a failure again, when I had to take my tablets.

However, God seemed to be saying to me that, "There is a special blessing for you if you do not lose faith in Me, no matter how strangely I seem to be dealing with you." (Matthew 11:6). His promise of healing still stood; it had not been rescinded.

God also told me to say grace before I took the tablets and to be thankful in everything. Slowly I recovered and my condition stabilised. But cortisone still had my body in a steely grip.

After all these years taking the drug, if I got a tooth out, or even if I got upset, extra cortisone was needed because my adrenal glands had atrophied and couldn't produce the adrenalin needed to carry me through.

I still had glaucoma and diabetes. I was still pear-shaped and had that terribly fragile skin. And I was still faced with a potentially fatal condition. When I tried to come off cortisone my blood pressure dropped alarmingly and I had to lie down or faint. It had a hold of my body and wouldn't let go. Once I thought, presumptuously as it turned out, that God was saying, "I will heal you." So I stopped taking my tablets and soon became very ill.

Doctors say you can kick cortisone addiction by very slow withdrawal, but each time I tried to wean myself off the drugs I got sick and had to up the dosage again.

It was an incredible irony in keeping with my whole life. I was healed of the incurable disease which had threatened my very existence, but here I was still dependent on the drug which treated that disease. And this "treatment" was in turn threatening my life. As I lay desperately sick in bed once more, I wondered what on earth could go wrong next.

EIGHT

Miracle at Dubbo

I had never really seen public healing until I went to the David Pawson/Bill Subritzky conference in Dubbo, New South Wales - about 800 kilometres from my home in Melbourne.

Sure, I had been healed of systemic lupus erythematosus. But that had been so low-key and seemed increasingly insignificant in the light of the cortisone dependency which was dogging every moment of every day. But in Dubbo I began to see that healing could be the norm rather than the exception.

I saw a man who couldn't even walk up to the stage running up and down stairs eight times after his healing.

I saw a woman sitting near me at lunch receive prayer and then testify that her injured lung had been healed and that air was coming into it for the first time in eight years.

I saw Bill Subritzky have a word of knowledge about a man with "a hole in his back", saw the man wandering up looking dazed, saw Bill pray for him, saw him fall to the floor, get up announcing the "hole" was gone and then return to his seat still looking dazed. At Bill's appeal for salvation later in the meeting, that man literally ran forward - such had been the effect of God's hand on his life.

Such examples weren't fakes and couldn't be put down to mass hysteria. They were God at work.

I knew David Pawson's ministry well, having listened to his tapes for years. But Bill Subritzky, a New Zealander, was totally unknown to me. The first time I heard him I thought, "You're no teacher, boy." But I was fascinated by his powerful ministry. I had never seen anything like this - the lame walking, the deaf hearing, the blind seeing. I had a certain amount of skepticism before the conference, yet I couldn't deny the things I was seeing. You can know sincerity when you see it. I seldom went to conferences and I had certainly never been to one like this - it was joy and excitement throughout and such a treat to be able to share with hundreds of like-minded, God-loving Christians.

My faith grew each time I saw a healing and each night I tried to join the crowds who flocked to the front to commit their lives to Christ and receive prayer for healing. But each time the crowd was so big and I was too scared of damaging my fragile legs to force my way through the throng.

But on the second-to-last night, Bill said, "I believe there are people here who are going to be healed. Stand up anyone who believes God is going to heal them tonight."

I looked around and saw hundreds of others standing and thought that if they could believe then so could I.

I stood, full of faith because of what I had seen. Suddenly, despite the crowd, it was as if I was all alone. I was no longer aware of the preacher or the people, but it was just me - and God. I said, "Lord, I believe..." and a tingling sensation, something like pins and needles, went through my body. Then a warmth spread through my lower back and I became immersed in a bubble of peace.

I sat down, maybe four or five minutes later, healed, once and for all, of cortisone dependency and anything else still afflicting my body. There were no lightning bolts, no dramatics - just warmth and peace and a surety of being touched by God.

After 30 years of sickness - firstly from SLE, then SLE and cortisone dependency and latterly just cortisone dependency - my health was completely and instantly restored.

I didn't tell anyone, not even the friend I was at the conference with. I had been sick too long to proclaim my healing to the world and then get egg on my face. But I went to sleep that night on a warm cloud, savouring an incredibly special moment.

In the morning, though, I awoke distinctly nervous. I had tried to come off cortisone before and the consequences had been nearly disastrous. The euphoria of the night before and the certainty of healing wasn't quite so real in the cold light of another day.

I resolved not to take any cortisone tablets, but I carried them around all day in my pocket, sometimes fingering the bottle like some sort of good luck charm.

That first day passed with no reaction, no illness. Normally if I stopped taking the cortisone I could feel it in 12 hours and would be sick within 24. Then another day went by, and another.

At the end of the first week I began to relax. After two weeks I flushed my cortisone pills down the toilet. I didn't need them any more. I was totally healed.

God has healed me four times in my life. He healed me spiritually - in my conversion and then spiritually and emotionally in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. And He twice healed me physically - from SLE and then cortisone dependency.

My overriding memory of each of these healings was peace. They weren't dramatic, breathtaking or even exciting to tell. But they were effective, and complete.

Six months after that Dubbo experience I visited my doctor, telling him for the first time that I was off cortisone. He was stunned to learn that I had stopped my treatment so abruptly and without medical supervision. He checked me over thoroughly and the results returned as follows:

- White cells - normal (never before)
- Blood count - normal (never before)
- Blood sugar- normal (diabetes healed)
- Potassium levels - normal
- Sodium levels - normal
- Nuclear factor (SLE test) - normal
- SLE blood test - normal
- Renal function - fine (had fluctuated)
- Blood pressure - 140/90
- Cortisone level - quite impossible, yet it was dead centre of normal limits
- Glaucoma - eyes normal
-

The doctor just shook his head in amazement when I told him it was God who had healed me. He couldn't dispute it; my healing couldn't be explained outside the supernatural power of God.

NINE

Bursting with Joy

My doctor had told me that if I ever managed to wean myself off cortisone my immune system would be affected and I would get every virus and infection going for the next six months.

But I didn't have a single side-effect as I withdrew from the cortisone. What's more, I had perfect health for the next four years - even when people around me were getting every kind of virus I didn't pick up any illness.

When I finally did get flu four years later it was like God's final confirmation of the totality of His healing. Instead of having to have an urgent increase of cortisone to fight off the sickness, I just rode it out like any normal person and quickly sprang back to full fitness. Healing remains a mystery to me.

I believe, and I believe Scripture confirms (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 8:16 & 17), that God always heals. The Cross is perfect in every respect. Nothing is lacking and Jesus has saved us physically as well as spiritually. It is inconceivable, for example, that we would enter heaven sick or disabled.

It's not a question of whether it is His will that we be healed. It is His will and we trust Him for His perfect time to heal us in all our weaknesses. But not all healing is instant. For some His healing is now, for some His time of healing is yet to come. For some, healing will come with death. Ecclesiastes 3:3 says there is a time to heal for each of us. We will all be healed in His time and in the waiting He promises a special blessing to those who do not lose faith in Him and His love.

My life has never been the same since that Dubbo healing. I bless Bill for his availability to the Lord.

When you have been sick so long, it's like coming back from death to life. When I was born again I came from darkness into the vivid, bright light of knowing Jesus. When I came into healing I came from physical oppression into bodily wholeness. Life began coursing through my veins again. I felt well, alive.

Today, four years later, I am in my 60s and feel better than I did in my 30s. And I still thank God every day for that wonderful mercy. My healing has been a testimony to so many people. Many had prayed, many had believed. For them to see God answer was faith-building and life-changing in itself.

It has also thrust me into a ministry beyond what I would have believed possible. I work with Wholeness Through Christ Ministries and I find my experiences of sickness and life in general stand me in good stead when I talk to people. I have been and done most things in my life, which means I never get shocked by people or what they tell me. I also know the reality of God and a combination of these factors means I have endless patience for people who are willing to be helped.

As for myself, healing means that my body no longer dictates my enjoyment.

An early miracle was the opportunity to go overseas with David. My illness had always meant that inoculations of any sort, even for the flu, would have brought on an SLE attack straight away.

Consequently I could only travel to countries where there were no diseases other than the ones that could be found in the streets of Australia. Any contact with a foreign virus would have given me a serious attack and could cause death.

I had always said the first thing I would do when I died would be to have a trip around the world and see everything.

But healing literally opened the world to me. For a long time we had supported and prayed for a girl in India. She was getting married that year and was desperate for us to come to the wedding. Few people enjoy injections for malaria, polio and meningitis and the like - but I truly bubbled as the needles pierced my arm - and David and I had a ball as we toured some of the world's most exotic places.

On a day-to-day level, I can go to a church meeting and sit through the whole thing. I can go to the dentist without having intensive cortisone for weeks before. I can give talks and I find my mind is sharper than it was decades ago. I can sit in the sun on a nice day. I can walk around the streets without getting exhausted. I can hang the washing out.

Often it's the smallest of things which thrill me most.

But most special of all, I can enjoy being a grandmother so much more than I could being a mother. I have five grandchildren and I go to their sports days and school breakups and prizegivings - all the things I could rarely do with my own children.

And sometimes I'm so grateful inside that I just about burst with joy.

TEN

How to be Born Again

By Bill Subritzky

1. WE MUST COUNT THE COST

There is a cost involved in being born again. The Bible tells us to count that cost before we decide to follow Jesus.

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

"Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27-33).

Becoming a Christian is not simply joining a club. It is a decision to take up a new way of life and become like Jesus Christ Himself, a revolutionary. This does not mean that we set out to pull down fleshly governments, but that we decide to adopt a radically changed lifestyle in the sense that Jesus Christ is now going to become Lord of every part of our life. Hence we need to consider the cost that is involved and be sure that we are prepared to pay the price. Once we have made that decision and never turn back, then we will begin to understand the job of being a Christian.

There is no "cheap" or "easy" grace. That is, we cannot expect God's favour to be upon us if we do not actively turn from sin and obey the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. BECOME LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

Having considered the cost, we then need to become like a little child in our approach to God. We need to put aside all prejudice, arrogance and pride and humble ourselves before God.

"Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."
(Matthew 18:25).

Our education will not get us into heaven, nor will our works of themselves. Jesus has pointed out that we need to humble ourselves like a little child if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ shocked His disciples by washing their feet before He went onto the cross. Peter objected to this but Jesus said that if He was not allowed to wash the feet of Peter, then Peter would have no part with Him. Peter quickly agreed to the washing, not only of his feet but also his hands and his head.

Jesus then said:

"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:13-15).

Satan fell because of pride. Pride is the greatest enemy to our coming to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Jesus has given us the example of humility.

3. REPENTANCE

Repentance does not mean being sorry for our sins, but rather turning completely from them. It is a 180 degree turn. It is a decision to turn from sin, not a feeling. When Jesus met Paul on the Damascus Road he spoke words which very clearly described the meaning of repentance:

"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:18).

Repentance is therefore turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. When we turn from darkness to light it means we allow the light of God fully into our lives and we turn away from all the darkness of sin.

John the Baptist, who was six months older than Jesus Christ and came as the forerunner to proclaim the coming of the Lord, preached the message of repentance. Among the first messages that Jesus preached were the words, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17). Repentance involves a complete change of heart, not just an emotion.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, the young man left his father's home after receiving his inheritance. He went and squandered it. When the son came to himself as he lay among the swine and wanted to eat their food, he said:

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, `Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:18-19).

And the next words we read are:

"And he arose and came to his father." (Luke 15:20).

He decided to repent and go back to his father. He in fact did something, namely he arose and went to his father. This shows the decision needed for repentance.

On the other hand, we are told that Judas, who betrayed Jesus Christ, was remorseful after he saw that Jesus Christ had been condemned. He brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. However, he was not repentant and therefore could not know God's forgiveness. In his remorse he went and hanged himself.

Remorse is a feeling, repentance is a decision. Repentance is where our will meets the will of God on the cross of Jesus Christ. We place our will under God's will and decide to follow Jesus. That is true repentance. No matter how we feel we make the decision and follow it.

We need to get on our knees and confess our sins to God. It is good to do this aloud and as we confess them the devil begins to flee from our life. We should do this from our heart. Tears of conviction may well flow. We need to forgive others, especially our parents and those who are closest to us. Lack of forgiveness on our part is the greatest barrier to a true walk with God. He has forgiven us of all our sins and therefore we must forgive others.

We must renounce all involvement in the occult, all wrong forms of sexual activity, all lying, cheating, immorality of all descriptions. The more repentant we are, the more we open ourselves to the Spirit of God. We can confess our sins directly to God through Jesus Christ because there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. On occasions it is good to confess our sins or trespasses to one another.

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16).

Whichever way we do it, it must be a heartfelt decision to turn from sin, to bring all the darkness out into the light so that the darkness flees. As we do so we will begin to know true deliverance from the power of sin.

4. RENOUNCE

Having confessed those sins, we then need to renounce them. That is, we need to turn absolutely from them and say that we do not want them in our lives and renounce them in the name of Jesus Christ.

5. GOD'S GRACE

In all of this we must remember the grace (favour) of God. It is through His favour that we have been saved through faith which God gives us. As we truly repent and turn from sin and turn to God, we find that the gift of God's faith and favour begins to operate in our lives.

If you have followed the above steps, then you are now ready to be born again. In following the above steps you may already know the infilling

presence of God upon you, but in any case, we should remember the condition of entry into the kingdom of God set out in Romans 10:8-10: "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:8-10).

Thus, as we confess with our mouths the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.

6. ARE YOU READY?

If so, could I have the privilege of suggesting a simple prayer which you might like to follow as you go on your knees:

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to You in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. I come a sinner and I now renounce all of my sins. I confess the sins of (name those sins) and I utterly renounce those sins in the name of Jesus Christ. I absolutely turn from them. I especially renounce any involvement in the occult (if you or your parents or ancestors have been in Freemasonry or Druids Lodge you should especially re-nounce that involvement). I renounce all the works of the devil.

I believe Jesus Christ came into this world, born of the virgin, that He walked this earth, that He was crucified on a cross and that He died in order to cleanse me from all sin, to reconcile me to You, Heavenly Father, and that through His precious blood He bought me back from the hand of the devil.

I believe He paid the total penalty for all of the sins I have ever committed and that through His blood I am cleansed, redeemed and sanctified, that is set apart to God, and justified, that is just as if I had never sinned.

I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day and is seated now at the right hand of God. I turn to You, Lord Jesus. I turn away from the power of darkness to the power of light, from the power of Satan to the power of God, and I ask You, Lord Jesus, to come into my

life by Your Holy Spirit. I surrender absolutely to You and I confess You as my Lord and my Saviour.

As you complete this prayer, you may well feel the peace of God descending upon you. It is good to stand to your feet and begin to thank God and praise Him for His goodness. You will start to realise the certainty of salvation in your heart and the fact that God has forgiven you and reconciled you to Himself through Jesus Christ. The joy of God will begin to flood your heart.

7. WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

On the day of Pentecost when Peter was preaching to the Jews and they were convicted in their hearts of their sins, they asked Peter and the rest of the Apostles,

"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The response of Peter was:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

You have now repented and now you need to be baptised in water if this has not happened to you before.

(a) WATER BAPTISM

Jesus Christ gave us the example of the need for water baptism as He Himself went under the waters of baptism. Even though John the Baptist argued with Jesus when Jesus asked John to baptise Him and said: "I have need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14).

The response of Jesus was:

"Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15).

Thus Jesus Christ gave us the example of the need for water baptism. When we undergo the waters of baptism, we fulfil what should have already been accomplished in our heart. Water baptism is the outward manifestation of the transaction which has taken place in our hearts as we have given our lives to Jesus Christ.

In undergoing water baptism we identify with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. As we undergo the waters of baptism, we recognise that our old lives have died and we are rising to a new life in Jesus Christ and that we are no longer the slaves of sin.

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (Romans 6:3-6).

Most cultures recognise the power of water baptism in one form or another. They recognise that it is a cutting off from the old life. For example, in India where I have seen many come forward to make a decision for Jesus Christ, there is often no real difficulty in their home life until they undergo the waters of baptism.

It is then that the real cutting off point occurs because their Hindu brothers and sisters recognise that this is a complete cutting off from the old life. Many times they disown the relatives who undergo water baptism. They may even throw them out of their homes. Thus there is a real price to pay to be a Christian in that land.

Water baptism is an act of obedience towards God. It is good for it to be carried out publicly before other believers with the candidate testifying about God's life-changing power in his or her life.

Church Attendance

It is important that we belong to a church that worships Jesus Christ and believes in whole Bible. It is recommended that if you do not already belong to a Christian church, that you join a Bible believing church so that you can grow as a member of the body of Christ.

(b) BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus Christ told His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. He had already breathed on them on the Sunday night of His resurrection when they received the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22).

Now He was telling them to wait for the promise of the Father so that they could be endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:49) We see those same commands set out in Acts chapter 1:4-8 when He promised that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8).

They duly waited a further ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven and then on the day of Pentecost the power of the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they spoke in tongues.

Peter explained that Jesus Christ, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, had poured out this which they now saw and heard. (Acts 2:33).

How to ask for the Baptism with the Holy Spirit:

1. Go on your knees before the Lord and confess all your sins and receive God's forgiveness.
2. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.
3. Allow the Holy Spirit to remind you of any areas of occult involvement on your part or on the part of your parents or ancestors. Renounce that involvement in the name of Jesus Christ.
4. Believe in your heart that the Word of God is absolutely true and that God, through Jesus Christ, will give this great blessing to you as you believe.
5. Say a simple prayer like this:
Dear Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, I renounce all my sins (name those sins) and I especially renounce all involvement in the occult or witchcraft on my own part or part of my parents or my ancestors. I renounce all fear and unbelief and any blockage of my mind. I ask You Lord Jesus to baptise me with the Holy Spirit.

How to Receive

You may be standing or kneeling. It is good to close our eyes and think of Jesus seated at the right hand of God, ready to pour out the promise of the Father upon us. As we quietly wait upon Him and allow Him to do this, we begin to sense the peace of God. We should not listen to what we are saying, but let God give us a new language. Then we will find that from our innermost being will flow a river of living water of worlds as the Holy Spirit helps us.

"but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give- him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14).

While we are kneeling and praying to God through Jesus Christ, we should realise that the Holy Spirit, deep within our heart, will rise up as we allow Him to do so. He will come like a river onto our tongue and help us to speak out in our new language.

For more information and resources see:

www.doveministries.com