



Gifts of Grace

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A book that offers hope for broken lives. It demonstrates God's generous grace working in the lives of individuals, bringing lasting change to otherwise hopeless circumstances. A most inspiring and uplifting read!

David Bailey, Assistant Pastor, Coton Green Church, Tamworth.

The way this booklet is written brings alive the words of the hymn 'Amazing Grace' in a probably previously unthought-of way. It also highlights God's redemption at Christ's expense – those gifts of Grace – in a simple and practical way, showing the reader through relevant scriptures linked with personal testimonies, just what God can achieve in a life given over to Him.

Lindsey Thompson, Lighthouse (Junior Church) leader and co-ordinator.

This booklet brings a favourite hymn to life. It will cause individuals to reflect personally whenever they sing the hymn or home-groups to share experiences when the booklet is used as a discussion starter.'

Dr Richard Massey, former Principal of Birmingham Christian college.

What's your story? Do you want to know it has a happy ending? Read about the grace of God in the life of the writer, in the lives of others he knows, in the scriptures, and in the words of the most popular hymn ever written. Then perhaps you too will 'set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed', (1Peter 1:13), and add your story to God's eternity. *John Plumb*

What! Speak through me?



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This book gives us an introduction into the gifts of the Spirit and how God can use us in this ministry. *Rev Pastor David Shearer, Coton Green Church, Tamworth.*

This booklet stimulates both discussion and practice of a neglected topic in today's church. It will be particularly useful in home groups. *Dr Richard Massey, former Principal of Birmingham Christian College.*

A great introduction to the gift of prophecy and its use in a contemporary setting. This short book lays a good foundation of theory and practice giving helpful guidelines and cautions. The style of writing is informal allowing a broad audience to benefit, and perhaps whetting the appetites of those who may have previously believed prophecy to be beyond them. *David Bailey, Assistant Pastor, Coton Green Church, Tamworth*

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PREFACE

I have always had a special place in my heart for the hymn “Amazing Grace”. So I was really thrilled when I felt the Lord prompt me to write this booklet. (Book? Booklet? I’m not sure how small a book can be before being called a booklet, nor how big a booklet can grow before standing proud and claiming to be a book!)

My first booklet, “What! Speak through me?” seemed small enough for most not to be overwhelmed, and big enough to cover the topic of prophecy at an introductory level. My hope is that this booklet will penetrate deep into your heart so that you discover more of the Glorious Gracious Gift-Giving God who loves you so much He would rather die than live without you.

My thanks go to all who have contributed in any way, including those brave enough to share their testimonies. If you look at this and think it is a bit rough at the edges, you should have seen it before my wife Gill intervened and Lindsey Thompson went through it with her green pen. Between them, to misquote, “they have made a silk ear out of a sow’s purse” and I am humbly indebted to them!

I pray, Lord Jesus, you will use this to reach many, so that they hear the sentiments of this hymn, which are packed with spiritual truths that will become real in their hearts, for your glory and our blessing.

Amen.

Introduction

A trip to West Africa

When my children were little, at bedtime, I would sometimes set their ceiling light swinging to mimic a ship rolling in a heavy sea. They knew what was coming. I'd always preface one of my stories with, "Did I ever tell you the time when I was...?"

They would snuggle down in bed and listen to me telling tales of my adventures when, as a young man, I had travelled the world in the Merchant Navy. For better or worse, those tales have stayed in their memories and occasionally they will recall them. When I celebrated reaching the grand age of 60, my daughter Julie wrote a tongue-in-cheek poem 22 verses long, recalling those early years. It started like this:

He is an Ancient Mariner,
And oft he stoppeth me.
"Did I ever tell thee, child of mine,
Of the time I went to sea?"

I joined the navy years ago
When I was just a boy,
The things I've seen, and the places I've been,
It's a story you'd enjoy."

However at this point I have other gripping tales to tell which I hope will captivate you.

It is strange how sights and smells and particular phrases all have an amazing way of jogging the memory. I spent a few years travelling around the West African coast with its beautiful golden beaches and palm trees. Every time I hear the song

'Amazing Grace' (and this is where I set the light swinging), I think of the time when I visited an old stone-built fort somewhere between Takoradi and Accra ... I stood outside the fort, close to the cliff edge, overlooking a jetty where the slave ships came in to collect their cargo. The poor souls were corralled in the fort until the ships arrived.

From the cliff top running down to the jetty was a little stream with moss-covered boulders most of the way down. One by one the slaves would be pushed into the stream where they slid and banged themselves on the boulders until they reached the bottom. By the time they reached the jetty, if still conscious, they had no fight left in them to resist being herded on to the ship and shackled on shelves stacked little more than a foot apart. Many died on the voyage due to the harsh conditions. Those that reached America were sold as slaves and forced to work for the benefit of a society that claimed to be Christian.

Most of the men who worked the slave ships were harsh and tough with seared consciences, many with a very base nature and devoid of any compassion. Some, however, could not cope with the work and left. There was a slave ship captain named John who was convicted by the Holy Spirit to leave. Some time after, he was truly converted to Christ and became an Anglican vicar.

He was greatly troubled by his past life and in the beginning of his Christian walk hardly believed that Christ could forgive him. Before his conversion he had tried to harden his attitude and view these fellow human beings as nothing more than cattle to be sold. After conversion, when John eventually realised the truth of Christ's forgiveness, he wrote a hymn that was his own testimony. It is now well-known and sung by millions all over the world. Of course, his name is John Newton and this is his testimony. Just read the words and think, as John would have, of those slaves from the West African coast:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
And Grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

John found freedom from his past life that Jesus promised in scripture. *John 8:31-32* "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Many of the truths that set you free in scripture are echoed in his hymn. They are like buds of beautiful flowers unfolding to release from within many colours, fragrances and textures. As these truths unfold they stimulate our inner being, bringing us great love, joy, peace, fun and awe, all blended together to create this beautiful flower of freedom, nourished by the amazing grace that Jesus promised and gives us in abundance through His Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is mentioned in Galatians. *Gal 5:22-23* *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*; This is a list that can be viewed in different ways.

One way is to see the total fruit of the Spirit as LOVE (because God is Love). This love is like an orange where all the segments are the other ingredients i.e. *joy, peace, etc*; all these elements combining to give the fullness of love.

Someone said joy is peace dancing and peace is joy resting. I would like to build on that and say the beginning of love is joy holding hands with peace. As you yield your heart to God, peace and joy will flow in on a tide of love. Don't be afraid of the tide coming in, it will buoy you up and carry you through life.

John Newton's life was fascinating and a lot has been said about it. However I would like to focus on some of the truths in his hymn. So let us start at verse one.

Chapter 1

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

I know the hymn was written 250 years ago in a style of English we don't use today. For example, do you see yourself as a 'wretch' in need of saving? Some of us will admit that we are "sinners", to use an old-fashioned biblical word, and need a Saviour. These days, we may say, "Yes, I have my short-comings, but I'm not really that bad compared to some people I could name". Rather like the Pharisee.

Luke 18:9-14 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

It was one of these breast-beating tax collectors that Jesus called (just as He did John Newton) to be a disciple, who later wrote a large section of canonised scripture, the gospel of Matthew. Although not canonised, John Newton wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace" which, in my opinion, is a real echo of spiritual truths already in scripture.

All the years involved in the slave trade had its effect. Day in, day out, inflicting pain and seeing the suffering of fellow human beings brought

John to a point of breakdown, where at last, like the tax collector, he saw his own utter wretchedness.

“Ah but,” you say, “I haven’t inflicted such suffering on others.” But have you realised how wretched and impure some of your thoughts and words have been or still are? Any act is first initiated by a thought. Take, for example, adultery. It is not just the act of having sex with someone else’s husband or wife; first there is the thought and desire. Whatever the sin, adultery or otherwise, it starts when we accept and dwell on the thought!

Jesus said: *Matt 5: 27-28 You have heard that it was said, ' You shall not commit adultery '; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Wow!! Viewed from the heights of God’s pure holiness, our middle class Pharisaical attitude is little better than John’s life was before his breakdown.

I say this with love, not harshness; we need to reach the place where, like John and the tax collector, we beat our breast and say, “*God, be merciful to me, the sinner!*” recognising that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. After true repentance then comes the amazing anointing of grace, God’s undeserved favour, or **G**od’s **R**edemption **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense. No longer blind, but seeing both our own wretchedness and God’s wonderful love flowing with mercy and salvation.

So whilst we may think we have not been really bad, yet compared to the purity of God and what He lovingly wants for us, our lives, in spiritual terms, are like the comparison between struggling on foot through a hot, dry desert with very little water, then arriving at a

beautiful oasis and sitting in the shade with luscious plants and fountains of water all around. Spiritually, we are no longer travellers in

an arid land, but sons and daughters of a king, seated with Christ in heavenly places, far above all powers and principalities.

*Eph 2:4-10 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. The good works we do **AFTER** receiving this grace and faith are the product of **His love** (because of His great love with which he loved us,) which is poured into us when we yield our hearts to Him in humble submission.*

The humble submission opens the door, enabling the grace and love (*his great love with which he loved us*) that God has already poured out, to fill us. Unless we truly humble ourselves before God it is almost impossible for us to experience this amazing love (*with which he loved us*).

“Oh, so do I need to act humbly for God to love me and give me His grace?” No, God already loves you; the only barrier to you experiencing it is your lack of **true** humility. There is no point acting or pretending to be humble. The scripture does **not** say “he who pretends to be humble will be exalted”. No, it says, “....but he who humbles **himself** will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

When my grandson Danny was about three or four years old, his big sister Emily had provoked him. So he started spitting at her. My daughter Julie told him that wasn't nice and to stop. He however, continued, even after being told a number of times to stop. Finally

Julie separated them and told Danny he had to sit in the porch until he was ready to say sorry.

Five minutes later, a sad little voice came from the porch, "I'm sorry mummy". His mum went in and cuddled him, telling him again how horrible spitting was. Then she said "So what is it mummy doesn't like?" An even sadder voice replied, "Me, mummy".

We often think God's displeasure and discipline are evidence that He doesn't love us. We are just like Danny who saw the discipline as evidence that mummy didn't love him. Nothing could be further from the truth! To some, love and discipline are opposites when, in reality, they are not. God in His love will discipline us to enable us to come to a place of humility so that the channels are open for His love to flow in.

When I was a teenager at school, one of our teachers was a wonderful, gentle Christian man. This was in the days of corporal punishment in the classroom but this teacher hardly ever used the cane. There were two lads who saw him as a soft touch and were continually being disruptive; repeatedly they were warned but took no notice. Finally one day, the teacher got out the cane and, in front of the class, caned them both and there were tears running down his face as he did it.

He didn't want to hurt them but knew, if nothing was done, their rebellion would only increase and their lives would get worse and possibly lead to crime, as well as be a bad influence on others. He cared and loved enough to discipline them.

Whilst corporal punishment without love is cruelty, or even violence, love without discipline is incomplete and potentially harmful. "Harmful?" I hear you say. Yes, harmful. I know of more than one situation where a boy was loved but never disciplined and their lives were ruined. Someone close to me who became an alcoholic, died of

alcohol abuse in his early forties. He was never correctly disciplined as a child and could not impose self-discipline in his own life.

*Heb 12:5-11 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; **For those whom the Lord loves HE disciplines, and HE scourges every son whom HE receives.**" It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, **but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.** All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; **yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.***

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, He already loves you completely. There are tears running down His face as He tries to bring you to the place of true repentance. If you are still thinking like Danny, that all the bad things that have happened to you proves mummy, or God, doesn't love you, then you are missing the point. God wants to flood your soul with His love and grace so that, like John, you can sing, Amazing Grace.

Here, in her own words, is a testimony by a friend I've known for years who now happily walks close with the Lord. Before she knew the Lord there was a real blockage in her heart that seemed to prevent her from experiencing any joy or real love, but as she yielded her life to the Lord bit by bit the blockage began to clear.

Sonia

I can remember driving past the Coton Centre when they first started building and saying to myself "I wonder what that is". It was so heavy on my heart that I started to ask around if anyone knew. Finally, one day I was told it was a Church and I thought to myself "I'm going to try that Church one day". Well that day came and when I walked through the doors I was on my own with 3 children and on anti-depressants (all I wanted to do was close my eyes and never wake up). God touched my life that day and I left changed. I couldn't wait to come back the following Sunday. God started to take me on a journey into the wilderness and many times I cried out to God to leave me but he picked me up and carried me. I came out knowing God more, loving Him more and knowing who I was in Christ. He has restored me and placed me on higher ground.

*Isaiah 42:16 "I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, In paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains.
These are the things I will do, and I will not leave them undone."*

God is sovereign, He had the full knowledge of my problems and the sorrows I was facing but He is all-powerful – nothing is beyond His ability to heal or restore. I love the Lord with all

my heart and every day I can't wait to spend time with Him and have that intimacy with Him. There is a part of my heart that finds more and more of God every day!

Psalms 116:1-2 I love the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.

There is never a day that goes by that I don't feel his arms around me.

There is a polarising effect after our response to God: those who have already pushed the door a little, see the light streaming in and long for more. Like Sonia's first experience made her long for more; she went back the following week and continued growing and receiving gifts of grace in her life! Once we allow a blockage to be removed, and yield our hearts to Him, then not only does this amazing grace and love fill us, but it also overflows to others.

Those who have not allowed the blockage to be removed are entrenched deeper in their bitterness and resistance, hardening their hearts more and more, putting a greater stress upon themselves. This may, yes hopefully, lead them to a point of realisation, as it did with John and others, and to the place where they cry out "*God, be merciful to me, the sinner!*" Then the grace will flow! Their souls will then be flooded with God's great love which He is longing to pour down on them! Then they will be able to say, no sing with John:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Here is a different testimony to God's grace in the life of Sandra which tells of what the Lord has done for her and with her. If you saw her gentle smile and kind nature you would never guess what she has been through.

Sandra

God met me at the crossroads. I was going my own way, I had everything - house, money, husband, lovely daughter, out to expensive restaurants, drinking champagne, but I was not truly happy inside, something was missing in my life.

I was not on the road God wanted me on. But when we choose God's road, God goes before us. We still have troubles and sorrows, but when we have God in our lives he gives us peace, comfort and strength.

The way to ask God into our lives is simple. First I had to say sorry for the things I had done wrong in my life, and ask for God's forgiveness. Thank him for dying on the cross for my sins. If you were the only person on the earth He would still have done it for you - He set me free and came into my life.

I got down on my knees in my lounge on the floor, and asked Jesus Christ into my life. Nothing seemed to happen at first, but when I found a church that was right for me, things began to happen. I knew God wanted me to deal with my deep roots, my childhood.

I was brought up with my three sisters, no brothers and without hugs and kisses. Our oldest sister June, who was brain damaged at birth, didn't want hugs and kisses or even to be touched. So we were brought up without these things. It was hard for me.

I remember once when I was eight years old a man in a butcher shop down our street showed me kindness, then he sexually assaulted me. Mom and Dad didn't do anything. I don't know why; perhaps they didn't know how or what to do. After that, I could not concentrate at school; I was dyslexic and lonely and a couple of times I tried to end my life

When I was about fifteen or sixteen years old, Mom and my sister Pamela were talking. Mom said something that made me excited, so I hugged her, but Mom pushed me away. From that day on, I hardened my heart towards her. Dad would let me help him; I always thought he would have liked a son.

God was showing me forgiveness; He had shown me how to put things right in my life. Mom was getting old and I didn't want regrets. So I made up my mind to show her love, I think she wanted love in her life too.

As I began to show her kindness and love, not with hugs and kisses, but by the things I did for her, Mom began to change too. I knew we had love for each other - it wasn't easy but with God's help everything is possible.

I am so glad and happy that God showed me how to love and changed my hardened heart. Mom died on the 24th April 2006. I am still learning things about myself, that are not pleasing to God. It's only Him I am answerable to.

So thank you God for changing me, altering my life and showing me my deep roots. I can now read and I enjoy reading the Bible. I also enjoy friendship with my brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Love in a hug,

Sandra.

Sandra's closing words show a common factor with those who have received God's grace. They love others, they want to spend time with them and they love God's Word.

Why do they love others? Because they have received love from God and have discovered that the more you give it away the more love you receive from the Lord!

Why do they want to spend time with other Christians? Because, like themselves, other Christians are also giving out this love which they in turn are receiving!

Why do they love God's Word? Because they know the author and Christ said "out of the mouth comes the abundance of the heart". Reading God's Word is like hearing God speak, and in His heart is love (because God is Love) which rides out on His Word!

Chapter 2.

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.

So it's God's grace that literally scares Hell out of us and further grace that shows us love and relieves us of our fears! I love the story of Paul and his transformation. So you can understand the comments that follow, here is the passage of scripture telling the whole of that story.

Acts 9:1-22 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for

he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, " Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Paul in today's terms was someone of high social standing, probably having the equivalent of a doctorate in Hebrew biblical law. He had stood by holding the coats of and approving of the murder of Stephen. He certainly considered himself and his mission of great importance and was not afraid to challenge any opposition. However, on the road to Damascus when the light exploded over him and he heard the voice he didn't look up, raise his arm and shake his fist! He didn't say, "Hey, don't you know who I am? I'm a Hebrew of the Hebrews!" No, he fell to the ground and said, "**Who are you, Lord?**" "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!*"

The risen Son of God spoke, no longer in the form of a humble human servant below Saul's social standing. This was the risen Christ, high above all powers and principalities, and Saul recognised the authority! 'Secret Millionaire' being revealed pales into insignificance compared to this revelation and encounter!

The account continues with Ananias being sent by the Lord to pray for him to receive his sight, after which, literally, Saul could say, as John Newton did, "I once was blind but now I see." Now Saul saw not only physically but spiritually. He later wrote in *Romans 8:38-39* *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

So by His wonderful grace and love, God was not slow to zap Saul on the road to Damascus. "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear!" With great love he disciplined His child; now at last His child was humbled and prayed with fasting for three days and nights. Did God look down laughing and mock Saul in his helplessness? No, God's discipline is not vindictive; it is bathed in love. He gave him hope in a vision of Ananias who came and said, "*Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*" Saul could now say with John Newton:

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved.

One of the features of the Holy Spirit is that He makes Jesus real to us. He opens our eyes spiritually so we can see Jesus not just as the Word made flesh, who can relate to us in human terms, but as Lord and God to whom every knee shall bow. Ananias was instructed not just to pray for Saul's healing to restore things to status quo, but to pray for the infilling of the Holy Spirit! This infilling shone a light on all the Hebrew scriptures his 'doctorate' had crammed into his mind, enabling him now to understand and experience God's grace. So he could not only say:

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.

But he also realised:

How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Here are a couple of testimonies from Claire and Sam, both of whom initially, because of circumstances, went off track. Both went through terrible times pushing the boundaries and getting into situations bigger than they could handle. Then God with His Amazing Grace, after they came to breaking point, like John and Paul, graciously relieved them of all their fears.

Claire

I didn't grow up in a church and we rarely discussed God in our house but as a close family our values were based upon Christian morals. As a young child I was shy, quiet and would much prefer being at home with my mummy than out playing with my friends.

My life became problematic as a teenager. I believed that to be accepted in social situations, I needed to be confident and care free. However, I couldn't recognize any qualities within myself that were worthy of self-assurance and was fearful that others felt the same. To gain the attention I wanted, whilst protecting my insecurities, I started to push boundaries, act defiantly, argue with my parents and become a challenge for teachers.

I believed my actions were increasing my popularity so the negative behaviour rapidly got worse. I truanted from school, ran away from home, smoked cigarettes, drank alcohol, dabbled with drugs, partied

for days, acted promiscuously and precociously. I behaved like I didn't have a care in the world; wouldn't admit it, but truthfully I was miserable.

Constantly fighting against the morals my parents had instilled in me caused me to lose my true identity. My true feelings were bottled up and as the problems got worse, I found it increasingly difficult to talk to anyone. My self-esteem plummeted and secretly I started self-harming and became bulimic. It felt terrible knowing the pain and worry I was causing to those who cared about me. I thank you God for their unconditional love and persistent efforts.

Then Mum became ill, we believed it to be bipolar disorder. As a family it was destroying us not knowing how to help her; she wasn't responding to medical interventions and in fact, the drugs made her mood swings more intense. The mental illness stole the strong, kind, compassionate, funny and selfless woman we all knew and loved. On the 17th October 2007, after suffering for 4 years, tragically my Mum committed suicide. I replayed her death over and over again in my head giving me nightmares even when I was awake. This caused me to be lost in the darkness of depressive, angry and guilty thoughts. Physically and mentally I destroyed myself. But in the midst of my sinister world there was a faint, shining light at the end of the tunnel which kept me just about connected with reality; I had a knowing that in 2 years to come I'd be okay.

The second anniversary of Mum's death came round and I was far from okay. After a series of events, I was at my lowest, most vulnerable, and in complete despair. Although I was unaware of it at the time, this must have been the point when I surrendered and let God in. My life started to change; I found the strength to seek professional help. The counselling helped me to put one foot in front

of the other. It was demanding and emotionally exhausting but it enabled me to bring about significant changes I drastically needed.

After six months I felt emotionally ready to take control of my life; I decided to go to college and continued to take one step at a time. A year later I had a new zest for life and started to question everything; I wanted to explore and look for meaning and purpose in our crazy world. God had been preparing me and now I was ready. So, when a last minute opportunity to join a studies, trip to Uganda came up, I jumped at the chance! Arriving in Uganda was quite a culture shock. From my conditioned, westernised perspective their living conditions and circumstances were horrifying, thus it was unbelievably humbling to be welcomed by such happy, kind and generous people. I questioned: what actually makes us happy?

As part of our studies we were taken to a local church. The church was overcrowded and everyone was smiling. As they sung their hymns with adoration and passion, I realised their happiness was due to a wealth I had not experienced. Their lives were full of the richness of hope, glory and spirit!

This wisdom stirred emotions in my heart. An overwhelming sensation came from deep within. I was afraid and tried to hold the emotion down, but it moved through my whole body till it surfaced, then I realised I needed to let go. The tears came and I cried with my whole body, releasing all the pain, all the sadness, all the guilt and anger. Then the feelings subsided and in their place came peace, stillness, calmness and all I could feel was love. For the first time in years, I could feel my Mum's love for me; my heart and mind was filled with nothing but love for her. I recognised the gift I had just been given and from that moment I knew - God was real!

Since then God has transformed my life. He has blessed me with beautiful friends who have taught me how to love, laugh and to know Jesus. Now, when I am in unsettled times I turn to Him, and through

faith He brings hope and happiness. His love has taught me how amazing the gift of life is. Also the potential we all possess to be extraordinary.

Knowing I am worthy of God's love and seeing myself through His eyes has set me free. I am no longer burdened and I know my experiences will be used for God's work. He has set out a pathway for me. I will passionately follow His light with my eyes and ears open and my heart full of the love He has poured into me.

Finally and most personally, through my relationship with God, it means I am close to my Mum. God has shown me that she is no longer suffering, she is at peace and today she will rejoice in heaven because she helped to bring me home. Thank you, Mum. May God bless you and remember you for all you have done for me. Thank you.

Sam

My story spans the course of a few years but came to a head last year! I really had awful teenage years and got myself into lots of situations that I shouldn't (as well as lots of situations out of my control).

My parents divorced when I was 13 and my Mum moved us to Bristol from the Midlands and had a nervous breakdown on the way, and I just remember getting to Bristol and Mum crying her eyes out for hours and hours and hours and we didn't know where we were or what was going on with no one to turn to.

That was just the start! I didn't have a childhood to be fair; I had to grow up way too young, take on far too much responsibility and thought I knew it all when I didn't! I was craving love and looking in all the wrong places!

I met my partner, Matthew, when I was 19 and we settled down for a while (5 years) but didn't address any of my issues. He then sadly passed away when we were 26 and I was a mess! I soul-searched and begged God for answers, and every time I received answers back! It gave me back my faith completely, but I still hadn't found a church.

God has stayed with me ever since! I didn't however, sort my life and went from one mess to another until finally I was on my knees! This was when I became ill with 2 slipped discs – I truly believe God was making me stop and take stock as I'd been avoiding it myself and was in a proper downward spiral! I lost my job and was off work for 2 years.

That's when I met Daz, he was amazing and looked after me while giving me the 'get up and go' to make my back better physically. I truly believe he was sent to me for a reason too, though only for a short while! He made me see that there was more to life and that I didn't have to do everything to please other people all the time (he certainly didn't and people still liked him!). I went into therapy and started to get myself sorted, but something was still missing!

Daz didn't work out – he started going to the festivals and just didn't have time for me, and he also went back to drugs and partying, which just wasn't what I wanted from life – but during the time we were together he taught me a lot.

We were never meant to be! But he had been my carer for over 12 months and I felt lost. All my issues came straight back up. I was lost without him. I was having panic attacks all day long; I just couldn't cope! The Lord literally brought me to my knees in order to find Him. And find Him I did!

It got so bad one day, I really couldn't cope at all, so I went straight from work to my dad's. Before I could say a word he told me of an experience he had that day. He was driving home from work on his

own, when suddenly he was so completely overwhelmed with fear, pain and confusion, and couldn't breathe. That was when he stopped the car. He said it was a good job he was on his own as it made him cry! It was precisely at that time that I was sitting in my car outside work having a panic attack and feeling desperate. God told him he had shown him this so as to understand what I was feeling. I should explain at this point that my Dad and step-mum are strong churchgoers and believers.

He sat me down. Then he told me all the things about God and the Bible and what He wanted for us and that I was in His care. All I had to do was take that love!

That happened on the Friday and I thought about it all weekend. On the Monday I was a changed person. Something came over me and I felt amazing!

I felt God's love pouring through me! I felt no fear, no confusion, no pain, nothing but pure love and peace for everyone and everything! He showed a future for me where it was possible to be happy, truly happy! It only lasted that one day but I will never, ever forget that feeling and I know that one day, with his care, I will get to live my life feeling like that every day! It's what keeps me going, even now.

Since then my life has transformed. He has shut the door on the bad things in my life and opened so many better doors for me! I had had my house on the market for months and months with no interest at all and I was desperate to get out of Atherstone and start a new life. I prayed and prayed. Within 2 months (yes, just 2 months) I had sold my house, bought and moved into a new house in Bristol that came complete with all the furniture, got a new job with a company that made allowances for my back and started my new life!

I have joined a local church, made lots of friends, turned my life around, did an Alpha course and am now helping lead that same Alpha course! I am no longer in pain, confused, feeling worthless, etc,

etc. I am finally starting to live my life and looking forward to all that will come with it. He has just done so much for me, it's hard to comprehend! May your life be filled with joy and love and peace, the kind that can only come from Him.

Chapter 3

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
And Grace will lead me home.

We look around a large room or hall and see a crowd of people. God looks and sees individuals. All are uniquely different, yet able to empathise with others, because of their experiences in life.

When my youngest child, Chris, was 18, his brother and sisters took him out for a meal to celebrate. With his prompting they got talking about each other's weak and strong character points. Finally they concluded that if they put all of their individual good points together in one person they could make the perfect human being. (I dread to think what would happen if they put all the bad points together!)

I wonder if Christ had something like that in mind when Paul wrote about the body of Christ and us all as different parts - each of us having a unique ministry meeting the needs of others where that part is missing in them.

1 Cor 12:12-26 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would

the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

*On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, **but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.***

We all need each other and we all have something to give to meet the needs of another.

Here, a friend shares her testimony of the Grace of God in her life as highlighted in the verse at the start of this chapter. Nothing is lost in God's economy; everything is used. After her ordeal, she is now able to come alongside those who are suffering as she did. Here is her story; her name has been changed for the sake of privacy.

Shelley

I spent almost 10 years in a controlling and manipulative relationship with a chap. When I look back, I was too vulnerable, naive and trusting to appreciate the danger (toils and snares) I was in, and I got in so deep that I could in no way get myself out. I was truly snared. I

lost my joy, I cried myself to sleep most nights, sometimes I cried so hard my head hurt.

I ended up clinically depressed and emotionally exhausted. But the worst thing was the deep pain I felt in my heart.

Each New Year would come around and I would hope things would be different that year, but after a few years I lost hope and thought things were never going to change. Grace brought me into a circle of Christian friends who cared for me and helped me to get out of the mess I was in ('Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far And Grace will lead me home.). Friends who could see danger at times when I could not. For a year, maybe longer, I felt the Lord was wooing me back to Himself. I had stopped going to church, although I never lost my faith in Him and still prayed often.

I knew the relationship had to end but could not see how I could get this man to leave my home and to leave me alone. I felt the Lord was telling me that He would make a way where there was no way (I'm told that's a song too!). Finally after several months of pleading with him to leave, he walked out of my home long enough for me to change the locks, and still to this day, I cannot believe that he did that without divine intervention. Two court cases, a restraining order and a harassment notice later, the Lord "cut me free from the cords of the wicked" *Ps129:4 The Lord is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked. And gave me a firm place to stand putting a new song in my mouth; Ps 40 1-4 I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord. How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust,*

The Lord confounded my enemies in court such that the opposing barrister just seemed to be confused and grasping at straws. However, it was more than being free in material terms. I felt the Lord flooding me with a deep, deep healing and soothing my inner pain with his tender love.

I was hurting so much inside that the emotional healing I experienced was too real, quick and lasting to have been anything other than from the Lord Himself. It just is not humanly possible for me to have healed so quickly like this without Him. The Lord did not let these things continue to overwhelm me and rob me of my life. He rescued me, healed me and brought me back into a closer walk with Himself. I know He will never leave me and that for some unfathomable reason, I am precious to Him. As the hymn shows, even in this life, He has truly **led me home!**

As Christians we are no different from non-Christians in that we still have problems and difficulties. Some we bring upon ourselves, other problems just come out of the blue. The main difference for the Christian is the fact that the Lord is there to carry us through. Some of us are aware of the Lord's presence even in the difficulties and that is a blessing. That was the case for Gill as she struggled with her husband's rejection of her for another woman. Very much like the story of the footprints in the sand.

She knew the Lord was carrying her "Lord when I look back over my life I can see in the good times there were two sets of footprints in the sand, yours and mine. In the bad times there was only one set of footprints. Why did you leave me?" "I never left you, my child; I was carrying you." Yes He does carry us and Gill was aware of the Lord's support, like an earthly father carries an exhausted infant at the end of a day out. He loves us, cares for us and is willing to help whenever we will let Him in. Here is my wife Gill's testimony.

Gill

When I was seven, a friend in my class invited me to Sunday School. I quickly got involved, enjoying all that they did. I also took my three younger sisters along.

Four years later the young people started a Friday night youth event at church called “Christian Endeavour”. It was primarily to encourage discipleship in us, and it did. Among other things I learnt how to give a testimony, open and close the meeting in prayer and give a little talk based on some Scripture. After about a year, one of the leaders spoke of ‘giving your heart and life to Jesus’.

All my life I was taught to be a “good girl” and do the right thing. Giving my heart and life to Him was the right thing to do... but it was also a choice I wanted to make. So that night I knelt beside my bed and prayed a prayer of repentance and asked Jesus in. I started to pray regularly and to read the Bible. Reading scripture was a discipline that I found hard, which is odd because I devoured fiction books. It's only in recent years that I have grown to truly love His Word, and I believe it's changing me.

As a teenager I met and fell in love with a Christian; when I finished University we got married. Twenty years and three children later, he left me for another woman. I was devastated. At that point all of our children were still at home; we cried and hugged each other a lot. Friends and family were an immense help too, especially in those early days.

At the school where I work, my fellow teachers, teaching assistants, secretary, cooks . . . during those difficult days all of them were also a great help. They were, (and still are!), a wonderful group of people – more than just work colleagues. They are committed to their work and want to help the children find fulfilment in every area of their lives, and because of this, they are great encouragers. As teachers we try to move the children forward and give them self-confidence. My

colleagues do this with the adults around them too, so it was a good place to be when I felt so fragile inside. Where I work is a safe place too; many of us have laughed and cried together.

My relationship with Jesus deepened after my husband left. Jesus became closer and closer to me. He and I laughed and cried together. He helped me to live my every-day life and then, from time to time, He brought something to the surface that He wanted to change or to heal, or both.

I personally believe that God put me at Anglesey Primary School. He has taken care of me both through the people there and through other friends and family. I am now happily married again with a large, growing family – it's wonderful being a Grandma. It's wonderful being in God's family too, people to love, and people to love you – as God does.

Chapter 4.

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

There are a number of scriptures that promise good to those who believe. When the Israelites had gone into captivity because of their waywardness God said through Jeremiah: *Jer 29:11-13 For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me **with all your heart.***

I wonder how Jeremiah felt? He had experienced years of persecution trying to get Israel to repent and lead Godly lives. Now his warnings about captivity had come to pass and instead of saying "I told you so!" God says "Tell them I want to give them a future and a hope."

Then when Moses tried to get Hobab to come with them he says; *Numbers 10:29 "We are setting out to the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us and we will do you good, for the Lord has promised good concerning Israel."*

Here is a testimony from Linda Currin of the Lord's amazing grace and goodness shielding her and her husband Garry as they navigated through many difficulties. Garry was prompted to pack up and leave home with a scripture that was confirmed when a friend delivered to them the exact same scripture a few days later. That led to a series of words and events that eventually brought them from New Zealand to England.

Linda

The song, 'Amazing Grace', by John Newton, has touched the heart strings of so many Christians, myself and family included. The verse at the beginning of this chapter stands out in particular.

When Garry and I came over to England we had no idea of why we were here or how long we would stay. We didn't know what we would do and what our hopes were, we just knew the Lord had directed us and we were secure in His Word.

Over time it became obvious from the Lord's leading that we were to buy a house, even though we had no furniture, no possessions except for a few towels and a couple of sheets. We needed 100% mortgage which an estate agent told us we would never get.

We sat and prayed outside the mortgage agent's office before going in. There we met a wonderful patriotic man who loved his country, and we loved living in it. After 10 minutes talking about the beauty of the UK together he suddenly said to us, "And how much do you want? Oh, you can borrow the whole lot if you want!" A God of Grace indeed. We were less than a year in the country with no credit rating. What a miracle of grace. Our cup was running over.

Apart from a few trips back to New Zealand to visit family, Linda and Garry settled in the UK, becoming a vital part of their local church, and have been a great encouragement and support to many. Garry eventually project-managed the building of the Coton Centre, the home of Coton Green Church. This was all because of God's Amazing Grace to them! They can testify that over the years; "The Lord has certainly promised good to us. His word our hope secured. He's been our shield and portion, throughout our whole life long."

Before David became king of Israel he spent many years avoiding King Saul who, in his madness, was trying to kill him. Time and time again the Lord delivered him from trouble; which inspired David to write many songs (some of which are included in the Book of Psalms). Here is part of one in the books of Samuel:

2 Samuel 22:1-4 And David spoke the words of this song to the Lord in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said, " The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my savior, You save me from violence."I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

The golden thread of Amazing Grace is not exclusive to John Newton. God's Grace started as Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. Many, many more will be eternally singing the praises of God's Amazing Grace.

As well as acts of grace for individuals, God also pours out His grace on groups. Here are two accounts of churches where the Lord showed His grace and paved the way for them.

A Local Church

A number of years ago there was a little struggling chapel. One day a visiting preacher came with a message about the power of the Holy Spirit which, if received, would have started them on the track of recovery. They didn't want to know and started to heckle him as he was trying to deliver the message which, in itself, was a wonderful gift of Grace. Finally in frustration he stopped and prophesied: "God will take this place from you and give it to a people who believe in the power of His Spirit." Then he walked out.

The little chapel membership dwindled and after a while closed down. For years it was used as an electrical warehouse.

Many years later, a small group of Spirit-filled Christians, who were meeting in a leaking old corrugated steel scout hut, desperately needed somewhere better to meet. They prayed and believed for God to provide. He did. For a few thousand pounds they bought the little chapel. They moved in and started to grow in numbers. Soon the chapel was not big enough.

How could they extend? It was built up all around them. Remember God says in Jer 29. *For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.* The town council decided to widen the road. This meant many buildings close to the new road had to be demolished including the chapel. The folk there were compensated so well that the new, bigger chapel, built near to the original, cost the members very little money.

God's prophetic word was fulfilled and His Gifts of Grace were poured out on those who believed and were ready to receive.

My own church

My own church started in Pastor David's home and rented school rooms. God has done so many wonderful things down the years, it would fill a book to record them all.

We were at a stage of growth where we had started to look for a 'home' of our own rather than continue using school halls. I had been with a working party at John Plumb's farm (a church member who is a farmer) to help prepare the site for the church camp the following week. Before starting to set up we gathered together in the middle of the field and prayed for God's presence and power in the camp the following week.

Then the Lord gave me a word that excited us all: “You shall see My glory”. We thanked the Lord and looked forward with expectancy for what He would do, little thinking He had more in mind than the church camp.

When the work party had finished I returned the minibus to Pastor David and he drove me home. On the way, with his eagle eyes, he saw across the fields a ‘for sale’ sign in a field gateway. We drove over, got out of the minibus and walked into a seven acre field.

David felt very excited as we prayed for the mind of the Lord, and he felt that this field was God’s provision for the Church. Then he said to me, “Have you got a Word?” I replied, “All I have going over and over in my head is the word I received earlier today: “You shall see My glory”. That seemed to confirm something in our spirits which led us to the auction.

The members had prayed and set a limit on our bid, but we were absolutely stunned when a farmer, turned property developer, outbid us. We came out of the Castle Hotel where the auction had been held, went into the castle grounds and prayed. “God we have come to the end of our resources but not to the end of yours; **our eyes are focused on you.**” By His Amazing Grace He had a better plan for us, (*a plan to prosper you*). Three days later, Bobbie (Pastor David’s wife) had a phone call from the farmer’s solicitor offering us the field, or a portion of it, at no extra cost. In fact he gave us an interest free loan over two years to pay for it. The farmer even gave us a gift towards the building! He was God’s provision for the church at that time. Truly God’s Amazing Grace for us.

When the deal went through, it was discovered on the deeds that the field was called “Church Field”. For hundreds (maybe thousands) of years God had had a plan to give us the field for His glory!

Step by step, miracle by miracle, God provided as we built a centre where His glory has been manifested time and time again. So many

obstacles were put in our way which the Lord overcame. He made a way where there was no way! As I said earlier, a book could be written about the things God has done at Coton Green Church. He has poured out His grace on so many over the years, some of whom have their testimonies in this booklet.

Chapter 5

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

Here the hymn makes the transition from human, physical life to the “after life”. A bible-believing Christian has a tremendous platform to stand on. So many scriptures referring to the Lord’s promises in this life, that the Christian has experienced and found to be true, gives us the confidence to trust what the bible has to say about life beyond the grave.

John Newton mentions passing through or “within” the veil. This has a scriptural link. In the design of the first tabernacle there was a curtain, or veil, that only the high priest could go through. Beyond the veil was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. It was regarded as very holy. This was going into the very presence of God Himself!

In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the people of Israel. It had good news and bad news.

The good news: Deut 28:1-10 " Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God: "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. "Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl."Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. "The Lord shall cause your enemies who rise up

against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways. The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you. The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you.

Now the bad news: *Deut 28:15 But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ...every blessing was reversed, so it went from blessings to poverty, confusion and defeat. He is a holy God, don't mess with Him. He is patient and long-suffering but not afraid to severely discipline you for your ultimate good.*

So when the high priest went through the veil into the Holy of Holies to plead on behalf of the people, he took his life in his hands. There came a time when the high priest would tie a long metal chain to himself so that if he was struck down with fire, the other priests could drag the charred remains out using the fire-proof chains without the risk of entering there themselves.

There was a respectful fear in the people towards the Holy of Holies. When the Jews built the Jerusalem temple it was a copy, in principal, of that tabernacle. It also had a Holy of Holies and the curtain was made of layers of goat skin 18 inches (45cm) thick.

When Christ died on the cross, there was an earthquake and among other things the curtain was split completely from top to bottom, (note, not bottom to top). This was to show that a power from on high (as can be seen from the scripture below) had made a way into the presence of God for all who accepted Christ. This was unthinkable

that anyone other than a priest could enter the presence of God and live.

Matt 27:50-54 . " And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom;

and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and (Because He WAS the resurrection!!) coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

*Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "**Truly this was the Son of God!**"*

So was John right? "I shall possess within the veil, a life of joy and peace." Or when you die is that the end? What does Paul say?

1 Thess 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

*Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. **Therefore comfort one another with these words.***

'Ah but', I hear you say, 'that was written two thousand years ago when they thought the Lord was coming back in their generation. Does that mean that those who died in the Lord then have been "asleep" all this time and are not waking up until the return of the Lord sometime in the future? Whilst this may offer some comfort, two thousand years plus is a long time to be "asleep" and be unaware of what is going on. Where is "a life of joy and peace" if you are unconscious and fast asleep?'

When Jesus was comforting Martha and Mary over the loss of Lazarus He said, *John 11:23-27 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, **and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.** Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."*

Christ is not asleep waiting out the time till the next stage of existence. He **is** alive, He **is** the resurrection, He **is** our High Priest interceding on our behalf in this life and the next! He **is** the **I AM and the one who lives and believes in Him will never die.**

Even going back to the Old Testament beliefs, Jesus corrects the erroneous teaching of the Sadducees.

Mark 12:18-27 Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if A man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother.

There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?

*For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ' **I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob** '? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."*

Not just mistaken, but *greatly* mistaken. In verse 26, He challenges their concept of the dead. When they pass from this life to the next, it's not so much that they have to wait but are transformed into something like angels. He doesn't say that when they were alive, He was the God of..., but He is the God of... Here He lists Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; in other scriptures He lists many more, but He could put in your name or mine. All are from different generations, and are all alive in Him. In the previous scripture, Christ shares with Mary and Martha that He IS the resurrection.

So what did Paul mean by, *those who have fallen asleep*? Things we don't understand are sometimes explained with metaphors in scripture; when we lay them side by side they can appear to contradict each other. Christ refers to Himself as the vine and then elsewhere as the Good Shepherd; so how can a vine be a shepherd? You smile because you realise that they were metaphors; of course He isn't really a vine or a shepherd. So metaphors have their limitations.

Maybe the 'asleep' is only relevant from our perspective because we have no link or communication with those "asleep". So when they died, we say they are not 'dead' but 'asleep' because from what we can see they are not up and walking around. I really don't know. John says in *1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.* If we are going to be like Him, I don't see us being shelved away in a "cryogenic pod" somewhere in heaven.

Let us look at what John wrote about his vision which shows us a glimpse of life in both Heaven and Earth in the end times. *Rev 7:9-17 ...after these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out (were they crying out in their sleep?)with a loud voice, saying,*

" Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying,

" Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

*Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; **and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.**"*

The above is not easy; yes it raises questions about when and what is the Great Tribulation. I am willing to say I don't know all the answers but there is enough here to see that there are believers in heaven who are not asleep! Further into the book is another part of the vision.

Rev 21:1-6 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying,

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then

He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Or if you want a simple summary, I quote John's words: "Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease, I shall possess within the veil, **A life of joy and peace.**"

Whilst we cannot give a comprehensive detailed account of life 'beyond the veil', there is sufficient information in scripture to give us comfort and assurance that it's going to be OK for those who have put their trust in Christ.

Nothing prepares you better for your own death, or the death of a loved one, than having a personal relationship with Jesus and a catalogue of personal promptings of the Holy Spirit in your own life, the memory of which will strengthen your faith. Whenever the Children of Israel were in trouble they recalled God's provision in history and it strengthened them to pray with faith in the present.

When my wife died, tragic as it was, because of Christ in me, I felt a strength and comfort through the pain. I was not like those without hope (*so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope*). It was not that I did not grieve, because I did, but I did not grieve like those with no hope.

The events that surrounded the whole experience were like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that came together to paint a picture of hope. This was God's Amazing Grace in our lives.

Ronnie had fought myeloma (bone marrow cancer) for seven years and over that period there were many incidents where we saw God's grace. Right up to the last few hours, God had given her a clear mind, joking with the family to try and make light of the situation.

In the end, everything in her body was breaking down and she began to lose clarity of mind.

She had always loved music of all types plus hymns and psalms which she would sing in the house. The evening before the morning of her departure, one of the house groups in my church was meeting, not knowing the latest situation with Ronnie.

Jenny, one of the members, arrived. They normally started with a chat over a coffee before going to prayer or study of scripture, but as soon as she sat down she said, "I've had this psalm on my heart all day, can I read it?" She read the whole psalm; here is a portion of it in the KJV which stood out to her.

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; **I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.***

After she had finished, the house group leader Hilary, said, "I think Ronnie is dying, I've just had a vision of her entering through a doorway of blinding light into the presence of God. Let's pray for her and the family."

That night Ronnie awoke and started to get out of bed. I said, "Where are you going?" "I've got to go." "Where?" "I've got to go singing!"

I managed to settle her back into bed, but they were her last words. A few hours later, she died with the family around the bed. Someone said in grief, "Oh Mum, don't go." Instantly I remembered her last words and said gently, "It's all right, she's gone singing." I told the family what had happened in the night.

Sandra (our daughter-in-law) prepared the service sheet to hand out at the funeral. On the back, she did a drawing of a door partly open with blinding light streaming out and on the handle was hung a sign that said "Gone singing". Just in front of the door on the floor were a pair of slippers. Sandra didn't know about the vision of Ronnie walking through the doorway of blinding light, nor when I asked her why she had drawn the slippers did she have a reason. I explained about Moses and the burning bush where God said, "Take off your sandals you are on holy ground." And that the door she had drawn was the entrance into the presence of God.

At the funeral service I had the privilege of saying to all the people there "Ronnie is not dead, Christ said, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.* As the coffin was carried out, the congregation sang the song from Isaiah 55:12 *"For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.* As the coffin was carried down the aisle, everyone who knew the song clapped and sang in time with the music. In the midst of tragedy there was a wonderful sense of joy in the hearts of those who believed (to the stunned amazement of non-Christians).

The Lord gave me strength in the months and years ahead as I grieved over the loss of Ronnie. I read in one of C.S. Lewis's books about grief, an incident in his own grieving; how some days he thought he could cope without his wife, then a memory would pop up into his mind and he said his confidence vanished like an ant in the mouth of a furnace.

Yes, I had days like that for quite a while. Then, after a time, God in His grace, helped me to let go of Ronnie. Later, at a stage in life when I never thought it possible, the Lord brought love and companionship back into my life again.

With my second wife Gill, I can never describe her as a replacement to Ronnie. A replacement implies another identical to the last. No-one can ever replace another person; we are all so different. It is like starting again on a new route and it's so exciting! Life continues with new adventures in the Lord for both of us!

Chapter 6

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

To sing God's praise for ten thousand years and still not be finished could be quite worrying for some of us. Thirty minutes on Sunday morning is fine; we can cope with that! Maybe that is because we haven't recognised the fullness of what God has done both for us and for others. So the thought of some angel saying, "We will now sing hymn number 7,895,456 in volume 28 of Heaven's Praise", really sounds daunting!

So what is worship? Is it a collection of hymns? Charles Wesley wrote over 10,000 poems/hymns in his (relative to eternity) short time on Earth. I wonder how many more he has written since he was "promoted"? Dare anyone ask? That is not even taking into account the likes of Graham Kendrick, Tim Hughes, Matt Redman and others.

Hymns consolidate a fact or a truth that can be a real joy to express. As we sing, the words knit with our spirit and bring us close to the Lord. Words are powerful. Even Shakespeare realised this when he wrote, "He who upon quotations dotes, thinks he grows immortal as he quotes". The thinking, reading and speaking of words evokes the spirit behind those words, for better or worse. *Phil 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.* A disciplined mind can be a great tool as long as it is in submission to and not quenching the Holy Spirit.

What else is worship? You can go on www.youtube.com and watch Danny MacAskill do some amazing stunts on his bike. He makes the bike jump on to hand rails, hover, ride along the top then jump on to a wall, jump on to and off roofs etc. You will be gasping with amazement and shouting “Wow!” every few seconds. In one way that is a form of worship.

For some people, seeing their football team score a goal and cheering is another form of worship. However, when God does something amazing in your life, and you are stunned by the power and brilliance of it, then you will **really** worship!

A friend of mine says, “Worshipping God is giving Him your full attention”. I agree. That is the discipline needed to enter into His presence and focus on Him.

Sometimes, however, it is God who captures our full attention with something He does that causes us to worship Him spontaneously and with abandon. Many years ago, I was working in Sales and was on a ‘commission only’ pay cheque.

My wife and I had no money, no food and no-one we could turn to. She looked at me and said, “What are you going to do?” I prayed “Oh God, you say in your Word that you will not see your children begging for bread. We are your children and have nothing to eat or money to buy food. Please have mercy on us.”

Within an hour a neighbour knocked on the door and asked if he could buy the radio (he knew it didn’t work) that was in my car. We had food for days! God had moved in a miraculous way! My immediate reaction was to shout, “HALLELUJAH!” - a Hebrew word meaning to praise and worship God with depth and feeling!

Sometimes we are in situations that have been committed to God and yet we are being pushed by circumstances towards the edge of the cliff crying out, "Lord! The next step is over!" and He says, "Trust me."

Then as you feel yourself falling, miraculously a giant air cushion comes between you and disaster. He does it for non-Christians too; in His love He sees the anguish of their hearts and intervenes. They say, "Phew, that was lucky!" No, that was God! Sometimes we find out that they did recognise that it was God – perhaps a piece in the jigsaw of their journey to life in Him.

There are so many incidents that happen in a Christian's life that cause you to burst into spontaneous 'wow' worship, and after ten thousand years in heaven I'm sure there will still be so many more God-incidents to see and hear of that there will be no end of 'wow' worship in sight!

One of the things that can cause us to worship God in our hearts is when He uses us in, say, the gifts of the Spirit, and we just KNOW that we had no foreknowledge about a situation that He reveals to us. One Sunday in a church service I brought a word of knowledge that went something like this.

"If things don't change they'll stay as they are. That sounds ridiculously obvious but it is frighteningly true. If you are in a relationship that is not right and you do nothing to change it, it will carry on the same year in, year out. If things don't change they WILL STAY AS THEY ARE."

After the service someone came to Gill and I for prayer who was in a terrible marriage where their partner was not a Christian and who was oppressively controlling their life. We prayed together with the individual and felt that it was the small start of a long haul back to regaining some dignity. God does not despise small beginnings. The reaching out of a hand, the sharing of a problem may seem a small

beginning but it may be all that is needed to start the change. When you think of the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary, nothing was obvious for months,

but from that small microscopic beginning, Christ was born and now millions have been saved and given new life. But of the many millions saved, God used you, and people like you (and me) to build links and allow His saving power to flow. I think we are ready for another **Hallelujah!**

Earlier I used the phrase: 'joy is peace dancing'. Joy is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When we bow the knee of our heart to God He floods us with His Spirit, joy bubbles up and we need a way of expressing it! Look at a happy child; he/she laughs, jump up and down, dance and sing. When you feel the joy rising, give God your full attention then flow with the Spirit. Who knows, He may prompt you to dance!

Think of David in 2 Sam 6:14-23 David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouting and the sound of the trumpet.

Then it happened as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul (David wife) looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

So they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt offering and the peace offering, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. Further, he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, both to men and women, a cake of bread and one of dates and one of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed each to his house.

But when David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants' maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!" So David said to Michal, " It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the Lord. I will be more lightly esteemed than this and will be humble in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished." Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

Some may say, "That was OK then, but it's not our culture to dance in church, it's not dignified." As Christians we have dual nationality, two passports. One, the passport of the nation of which we are a citizen. Second, heaven's passport signed by the shed blood of Jesus.

Phil 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Apply the saying "When in Rome...". Have consideration for your own culture when amongst those of your culture, but when in the presence of God, apply His culture as recorded in scripture (Heaven's citizens' handbook) which amongst other things says, *Psalm 30:11-12 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, that my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.* Seems like the joy of the Lord and dancing go together!

Dance can express every human emotion. In the early years of my church, people would dance in worship to express the freedom and joy they had before the Lord. Those who were critical would call it "the charismatic hop" because many of us just hopped up and down to the

music. Now in many churches you can see beautiful and gentle unrehearsed movements of worship which draw many hearts to experience God's gentle, caring love.

God has so many different facets of His character which can be expressed in many ways, including dance. As we express the feelings we have before God in worship (singing, movement, dance etc) His Spirit joins our spirit and we become one. Others see this oneness, their hearts melt and soon they also become one with the Lord.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION? No! God's AMAZING Grace will never end!

Over two hundred years have passed since John wrote the hymn in a language we are not really familiar with today, yet it still speaks to millions. Eternal truths, which come from God, never change or go out of date. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Each generation grapples to put these truths in context with their own culture and language.

Our spoken language, however, does change. Isn't it wonderful that the Old Testament and the New Testament are both written in dead languages? A dead language NEVER changes. There is sufficient material for each changing generation to get to the heart of each dead language and translate the original into the languages of the day. Let's look at verse one again.

"Amazing GRACE how sweet the sound."

Eternal truth number one: we are redeemed and justified freely by God's AMAZING GRACE. In *Romans 3:22-24* *for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;*

"That SAVED a wretch like me."

Eternal truth number two: we are SAVED by God's AMAZING GRACE. *Ephesians 2:8-10* *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

“I once was LOST but now I’m FOUND,”

Eternal truth number three: when the Father sees you coming He will run to kiss and hug you like He did with the prodigal son.

Luke 15:31-32 and he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found. '

“Was BLIND, but now I SEE.”

Eternal truth number four: He makes the blind see, not just with their eyes but with their whole being.

Luke 7:22-23 and He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

Eternal truth number... sorry, it would take an eternity to declare all the eternal truths of His gifts of grace: *John 1:16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace* (The more grace you give the more you will receive) *upon grace.*

Let me conclude by saying this. He loves you, He died for you; if you ask Him, He will forgive and save you. If you submit to Him, He will fill you with His Spirit. The fruit of His Spirit is Love. He will give you His Peace; He will give you His Joy that will be your strength. When Peace and Joy holds hands in your heart you will begin to know His LOVE. Then your joy will dance and sing with John and millions more. “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound...” I’m going to leave you with one more testimony. This is from a young man I met in prison when a group of us were leading bible studies with prisoners who had come to know the Lord. I had the joy of seeing him, along with other

prisoners, being baptised. In just a few words he expresses his own journey so far, "I once was lost but now I'm found". I pray you will feel the passion in his words.

Rudy

To be so far from knowing what matters. I was going through life replacing god after god with more of the devil's false hopes and dreams. To be lost without knowing it. How dark is such a place. Then to see a light that stays on long enough to show a way out, only to find yourself into something else.

I needed saving, but from what? Myself, my friends, the troubles I was experiencing, this life, prison, people...? Yes I was still breathing, even after straying so far. So far that I was cursing His name and disregarding the truth.

Every morning I would wake up dead, just able to walk. Did I feel alone? No, I knew something, someone was there, yet because of not knowing who, I remained alone within myself.

But GRACE came, in love from a woman I'd caused seventeen years of pain yet she still prayed for me. Then GRACE from the love of a stranger who ministered hope to me in Christ Jesus. Up until then although GRACE was the thing we can receive without deserving anything, it was the thing I needed but had disregarded.

Now to believe in the One unknown, to give my limits to the Limitless One. Then to feel loved. Why, who was I that He should care, let alone love me? I was so wrong I needed remaking. I felt I had to do something but was shown Jesus had done it all! Amazing Grace, that I have been put right by a God who limited Himself to being a man, to die for me, to redeem me, when I was a stubborn lying thief!

There was nothing I could do, You didn't want my "sorry" my "pardon" my "I won't do it again". You just wanted me, my difficulties, stresses, confusions and hurts; my very being, so that your love can set me free. You call it Grace. What a beautiful word, how amazing is that Grace? That I would be sitting down one day reflecting on your love, and writing it down as a testimony to the Grace that is there in your faithfulness.

Now, here I am, in your promise, in your Spirit. My life only just at the start, yet I have your riches in its fullness. In my heart is your truth treasured, in my head, your salvation, bringing hope to my body, that when all shall cease I shall rise in my spirit, in an indestructible form, non-perishable; in joy and peace will my life be.

Grace the love that is unknown. Praise the risen Christ Jesus, Amen!

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Enquires from prisons:-

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