

Deep Waters (Troubled Waters)

In this latest in a series of books, Christian general practitioner Peter Reis shares his experiences of God's deep love and compassion for those afflicted by illness and how He goes about healing His people.

He recounts the problems and difficulties faced by his patients and their carers. While this is not a reference book for the medical fraternity, social workers and others who apply their Christian faith in this hard and harrowing field of health care, it is however an indispensable guide to people providing care and comfort for those in need.

Peter has been a general practitioner for the past 23 years and has encountered many complex social problems. His earlier work entitled **THERE IS HOPE** received international acclaim from people who have found themselves in hopeless situations.

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Foreword

There are many reasons for writing this book, the most notable being the experience I gained from writing my previous book 'There is Hope'. It made me realise that this was an effective way in which I could reach out and encourage others in similar situations. After all, a written message has the potential to reach many. I am confident that in writing this book I am being obedient and it is my duty as a Christian to minister to people not only as a medical practitioner, but as a friend in Christ.

Just as many other fellow Christians, I too have experienced many difficult years of strife and failure. The Bible says (Hosea 4:6) "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge". Looking back over my own life, I know this to be true and felt led by the Lord to share with others the life-changing knowledge I had gained from Him.

It is so important to share the knowledge one has gained, even that which is learnt from negative and damaging experiences. Furthermore, there seems to be a need both within and outside the church for a Christian doctor to share this testimony. This book contains a decade of experiences in medical pastoral care and is therefore valuable for Christians providing medical and pastoral care.

Furthermore, I hope this book will testify to the power of God's Kingdom and demonstrate how the mentally and physically ill have been saved by His power. Jesus is the same today and He is still calling people to His ministry, just as He did in Galilee and Jerusalem. I want to share how God, in His wondrous way, is with each one of us in dire situations and how He gives us strength and courage to cope.

The book's title refers to the profound path your life takes when you decide to follow Jesus. It's a life where you need to let go of all securities and all that is familiar to you

and take a plunge into the deep unknown, safe in the knowledge that God is leading the way and to persevere regardless of the circumstances.

As Christians we experience situations which don't make sense to unbelievers. It is safe in the knowledge that He is with us in all situations that is ours to claim. We can find these testimonies in the Bible. As Christians we can identify with the many life-changing experiences of Jesus Christ - the joy and riches of a person living a life filled with the Holy Spirit and also the crucifixion, rejection, criticism and loneliness.

Our life is the life of Christ, which is the life we live. We are in Him and He is in us.

Then we get an insight of how profound that walk with Him is. He invites us to walk that path with Him, to bathe in the river of Living Water.

I am deeply indebted to my mother-in-law, Mrs Langerak, who supported me during a crucial time in my Spiritual life.

Further I would like to thank H. Geesink, a fellow Christian doctor and friend who helped me tremendously. He also ran my practice when necessary thereby enabling me to continue writing this book.

I would also like to thank J. van de Velde for his input as the word processor.

I dedicate this book to my family who have also been a part of this journey I have made in the past 15 years. They have witnessed the pastoral care patients received at my practice, which is also their home. I hope this book will be a rich inheritance for them as they grow into adulthood.

Peter Reis
The Hague, 1991

Imagine meeting God regardless of your religious beliefs, whether you're a believer or an atheist; a meaningful and profound encounter which would change your outlook on life, your plans and dreams and even how you feel about yourself. Imagine meeting the One who created you. An encounter which surpasses all human understanding. It would be heartless of me not to share this message with those who are experiencing crises and are in desperate need to hear it. As a general practitioner I must first and foremost provide competent medical care. As a Christian doctor I am however also aware that I need to spread the message of Christ's salvation. This is a daily occurrence and I am faced with the challenge of bringing this message to patients who do not expect me to bring God into the consultation room. But it is the power of God's incredible love which drives you to share this with all mankind, especially those afflicted with physical and mental pain. You will intuitively know when the time has come to share this incredibly wonderful message. You try to find common ground with which to broach the subject. You learn the importance of building up a trusted relationship (which could take years to develop) before sharing your life-changing experience of accepting Jesus as your Saviour. It is wonderful to know that it is Christ who helps us (in what is after all a very personal experience) to approach people with His message of Salvation and that His timing is perfect. Deep Water shares patient's experiences of living a life in Christ, how their relationship with the Lord grows and deepens and how they deal with questions and answers in their daily lives.

Walking with the Lord

His plan for each one of us

The difference between someone who has God's guidance and the person who doesn't is enormous. The former knows that God has a blueprint for the growth and development of His child's life. Just as a gardener influences the growth and development of his plants by fertilizing, feeding, providing lighting and pruning, so God determines how our lives will develop under the influence of His blessing and the circumstances surrounding our lives. Each one of us is unique to God and we are able to achieve through Him things that seem impossible to mankind. This is evident in the diversity of people who live their lives through Him. It is in these differences that we discover the unsurpassed wealth of His kingdom. God is like an artist depicting the smallest unique detail and at the same time incorporating orderly simplicity.

God has the same fundamental plan for each person. He wants to embrace us and be a Friend and Father to us. He wants us to feel safe in His care, just as a child feels safe with its earthly father. He wants us to put our trust in Him because He is good and just. The bible unfolds the heavenly architect's unique and glorious plan that He has for each one of us.

Freedom is woven into this plan. He does not coerce us. Only of our own freewill can we partake of it. It is our prerogative and God does not pressure us into making a decision. We are therefore faced with a choice. We can either choose to follow God and His plan for our lives, or live our lives without His guidance, protection and blessing, just as the prodigal son did. He went his own way only to end up in abject poverty after leading a futile life of pseudo happiness.

A person who chooses a life without God's plan will constantly come across stumbling blocks either in this life or in eternity.

This is the message:

By choosing to reject God's plan and therefore His harmony and glory we enter eternity without His blessings. Outside of God, who is the light, there is only darkness. Darkness means Godlessness, consequently living an eternity without the love and warmth of His presence.

There is no-one else to blame but you. It could have been so different had you not rejected Him. One day it might be too late. God is building a house filled with His magnificent presence which is why He is reaching out to you now. He is searching for the living stones that are willing to serve as building blocks for His house of light.

Maybe you believe death is final, but I tell you 'Even though you die a physical death, your spirit does not die and lives for eternity. You will be witness to this, whether you wish to or not'.

This is why it's so important to know God's plan for your life. He wants you in His house and to love you as a Father.

Maybe you come to your senses and start thinking about God's plan for you. You try to find your niche in this plan. This is good, take your time as this is about your life. It is personal and it's between you and God.

Getting to know God as your Father and discovering His plan for your life can change everything and be the answer to your problems.

Even people who suffer from severe psychological problems have experienced this.

When one gets to know God, depression or states of anxiety can be resolved. Sometimes it doesn't happen immediately and then the person receives strength until a change takes place.

One often finds that the actual reason for suffering a crisis is the lack of solid spiritual grounding.

It took a crisis to bring me to the point of questioning why I was alive. I have found the same in my patients.

I once spoke to a historian who found himself unemployed after finishing his studies and consequently experienced a spiritual crisis. He just could not find his niche in society. After an intense discussion which lasted about three-quarters of an hour, we came to the core of the problem. He felt despair both with himself and the world around him and was full of questions; what is the purpose of my life, why am I here, is it a coincidence, was I created? The absence of a bond with the One who created all things can be reason enough for a person to become depressed. It is then that we lack the inner strength to lead a fruitful life.

As a doctor you can assist with a person's needs such as work, housing, family situations, physical problems and psychological well-being. There comes a time however when it is God's time. Then you must be prepared to help and guide the person until he or she has a firm grasp of the Lord's hand. Only then is God's plan revealed. Sometimes I wonder: how long has our Father waited for this moment to meet and save you. How long did he wait patiently and longingly for you? How blessed are those that have known him from a young age.

Is forgiveness outdated?

When I think of forgiveness in these times, it can be compared with a river that disappears into the ground. My generation has a hard attitude of standing up for your rights, finding your own way and being nonchalant about life. If you press your ear close enough to the ground and listen carefully you can still vaguely hear the sound of this underground river. The concept of forgiveness seems to have changed: man refers to forgiveness as stupid sentimental emotions. We live in a time of indifference. Children feel pressured to make their mark from an early age to be accepted by their peers. This hardening of attitude is also evident within the family. Parents struggle to teach siblings to acknowledge when they have done wrong and to ask forgiveness. There is another river running parallel to the first. This river has its source in the acknowledgement of our guilt. We try to avoid this issue of guilt because by ignoring it we don't have to ask for forgiveness and deal with it.

We rationalise people's bad behaviour and blame all wrong doing on their upbringing. A lack of parental love explains why children steal. Sexual perversity is blamed on the

child's emotional development. Authoritarian and other degrading behaviour is often used to compensate for feelings of inferiority. Aggressive behaviour is blamed on feelings of helplessness. The reason for all these feelings and actions seems to be more important than the consequences: a person's life is branded by guilt, even though he does not realise it.

Our morals born from the deep knowledge of good and bad goes back to our early leaders, men of God who knew his laws. But the evolution of these norms from generation to generation has been left floundering.

The Bible says that the time will come when people's love shall become indifferent and lawlessness will increase.

I believe we are now living in that time.

Forgiveness and guilt no longer have a place in our culture.

When I was 21, forgiveness and guilt meant almost nothing to me. As an extreme leftist student I experienced emotional indifference. I became more and more resentful towards the established order. Feelings of guilt, despite stealing and promiscuity, were virtually non-existent. I was however feeling empty and lost and feelings of anxiety and despair enveloped me. At that time however, I did not realise that these feelings were caused by guilt.

It was in that year that God revealed to me that I needed forgiveness of sins. No philosophies, no psychological reasoning, what was needed was a renewing of my soul. He made me realise that I was not living a God filled life and that I was guilty of so many sins. It was when I met Jesus that the river of guilt surfaced. These feelings were simultaneously being replaced by a warm stream of forgiveness which flowed through me and cleansed my conscience, renewed my inner life and erased all rebellious feelings and anger.

I experienced God's amazing power of forgiveness. An experience so precious and unique, that I wanted to share it with the world. The truth about forgiveness is hard to find these days.

Isaiah (9:1) 'The people walk in darkness'. Darkness enables us to hide that which we would rather keep hidden from the world and seems to make life easier.

That is until God makes His appearance and lights up the world with His cross. That is the moment that the world will see the light. Those who love the light more than darkness will come to the cross. They are prepared to be bathed in this light and reveal their faults and weaknesses.

When these sins are confessed at the cross, they are immediately cleansed.

When we allow Jesus into our lives, our hearts are lit from within. Then God pricks our conscience and this is when the renewal starts taking place. Our faults are laid bare. We begin to experience guilt and remorse. Forgiveness means that all blame is washed away, thereby removing our feelings of guilt. The past is put behind us and our minds become child-like once more.

Light, darkness and forgiveness are realities in the dimensions of our spiritual life.

The Bible teaches us that God is a God of forgiveness and also that He is a righteous judge.

God wants to cleanse our conscience, but first we need to accept that we are heavy laden. This applies to everyone, to the evil as well as to the so-called good people.

A surgeon lances an abscess and disinfects it with antiseptic afterwards. First the abscess must be drained before the cleansing power of the antiseptic can do its work. This is the same with forgiveness. It does not ignore or deny wrongdoing, but acknowledges it and then forgiveness follows. That is why forgiveness is not a sign of weakness, but one of strength.

In my practice I have experienced the power of God's forgiveness through the cross of Jesus.

I once had a young man who came to see me as he had become a habitual cocaine user. What had once been a recreational habit had now changed him into a drug addict. His studies had fallen by the wayside as had his self respect when he found himself standing with groups of addicts waiting to be given their dose of methadone. He broke down sobbing.

He had reached rock bottom and his life was meaningless. Then I told him that I too had experienced that futile existence many years before. How, due to my own fault, I too had been living in a spiritual vacuum. I shared how my meeting Jesus had enabled me to start a new life. The very fact that I became a doctor is evidence of this. I would never have achieved anything without Him. During this discussion, the Holy Spirit started ministering to me about forgiveness. I told him that he needed a fresh start and that he could do this by asking God for forgiveness. To my utter amazement he agreed, although he felt like a hypocrite calling on the Lord at that time, as he had never done so before. It was a complex argument, but by discussing his problem it became clear that pride was the actual reason for his hesitation. He found it difficult to humble himself before God, so-called losing face, but he did it.

As we prayed the sinner's prayer, an immediate change occurred. He experienced the joy of forgiveness and looked radiant. When he returned two weeks later he told me that the world had once again opened up to him – everything looked brighter, he had stopped using drugs and he was once again involved in creative activities - wonderful!

When you witness the life-changing power of salvation first hand, you will never doubt again. This is the great secret of the joyous message of the gospel.

This is what is needed by many to be set free from the oppressive spiritual state.

I once discussed this with a psychiatrist. Both our patients were carrying heavy loads of hatred, anger and revenge which had developed through conflicts or disappointments with others - in a marriage or at work. How often I meet people who have come to the consulting rooms suffering from anxiety and have been on disability benefits because of conflicts at work.

They harbour feelings of revenge and hatred and you can understand how they arise, after all these are human emotions. Anger's barb has embedded itself deeply and who is able to remove it?

The solution is that the person seeks God and tells Him exactly how he feels; admits that he is seething with anger which he cannot get rid of. He asks forgiveness for this at the cross of Jesus - this is where God has offered forgiveness to the whole world. This is when the miracle takes place. The power of forgiveness becomes real and visible. We are then able to forgive each other's sins.

What is at the core of this wonderful power of forgiveness?

That God touches mankind through the crucifixion of Jesus, where He hangs His head and dies; God became man and died on the cross for us, bearing our sins, wiping the slate clean. When someone is punished, the debt is settled. This is exactly what Jesus did for us. He bore my hate, my lies, my unfaithfulness, my anger, but also my torment and loneliness. He fully identified with my weaknesses and guilt.

He paved the way to our Father.

Our feeble minds could never imagine that something so wonderful was possible.

Many philosophies and religions try to find the origin of life or how to reach God. This is where you see that He Himself comes to us.

No effort is needed; just accept the forgiveness that is being offered to you.

Jesus, here I stand with all my faults and shortcomings; I know I have failed so often. Here I stand, my life bared before you, take me as your child, Lord, and forgive me my sins. Remove all that is bad in my life. Thank you Lord for allowing me to follow you and that you want to be my God.

Amen

He who receives forgiveness becomes someone who can also forgive others. Forgiveness starts with God and radiates towards us. It is a tangible power of love that fills us to overflowing and which acts like a reservoir when we need to tap into it. Then forgiving others is not an attempt at forgiveness, but we can then say 'I truly forgive you'. A couple, whose marriage has withered because they are disappointed in their spouse, often talk of their helplessness. I then steer them back to the forgiving power of Jesus, especially those couples who know the Lord.

This enables them to forgive each other at the cross of Jesus.

Encounters

I once met a young woman who, after watching a television programme about hypnosis, asked me to refer her to one of 'those people'. She told me there were so many things in her life that were causing her pain and sorrow. She had often considered committing suicide because life seemed to be futile.

There were many reasons which could point to the origin of her pain. Her parents were divorced and she had a heavy workload. While considering her request to see a hypnotist, I made an amazing discovery.

When she was younger she had a clearly defined philosophy of life. During puberty she had even toyed with the idea of leading a celibate life and becoming a nun after taking a stand for the Lord. She could not fulfill this commitment, so she drifted further away from God until she no longer communicated with Him.

The child He had once known had become a stranger to Him. What a pity that her choice to follow God meant she wanted to become a nun, as she felt this was the only way God would accept her. Jesus invites us to come unto Him just as we are so He can save us from our sinful lives. One Christian feels her vocation is to be a dedicated mother, while another finds fulfilment following a career. Then there are others who feel they are called

to God's ministry. It also depends on how far we are willing to go. Firstly, though, the Lord meets with us and simply asks us to have faith and to trust in His salvation. There are various reasons for not understanding the Christian way of life. Many people think that when we accept Jesus our lives become colourless and that we are governed by strict laws. It's not surprising that they then resist the Lord's salvation. When we started praying together for the Lord to restore her relationship with Him, I immediately witnessed a change in her and she described how she had felt a blanket of peace descending on her. She continued to improve and slowly overcame her psychological problems and found the strength once again to work and live a joyful life. She has since then married and moved on with her life. As a consequence of this initial consultation and the healing that took place, her relationship with one of her family members who had worried so much about her suicidal tendencies was restored. Together they experienced a close relationship, with Christ as the foundation. We yet again see how God's incredible love for us knows no boundaries or limitations and how he can touch the lives of many, often entire families who need healing and restoration of lives alienated from Him. Imagine if I had not had the courage to broach the subject of God or had let the opportunity pass by without sharing about the Lord.

A woman in her thirties came to see me at my surgery. I had known her for about a year and knew she suffered from severe hyperventilation syndrome. She had even had an attack in my surgery. Her life was characterized by tremendous trauma, ill-treatment and humiliation. Due to years of this maltreatment she had lost her self control. Her life had become a psychological hell filled with fear. A colleague psychiatrist had been seeing her for a year and was prescribing medicine and therapy. She had been admitted to psychiatric institutions many times in the past. I had shared with her about half a year earlier how I had come to know Jesus in my time of crisis. She did not show any interest in what I had to say, so I decided not to broach the subject again. There came a time however, when I felt driven to ask her if she had ever given any thought to our discussion. I was amazed to hear that she had been reading the Bible, regardless of how anxious and unhappy she felt. She was not well educated, but that did not stop her reading about Jesus' life. She had been really touched by the life He had led. Each time she felt the old anxieties resurfacing, she would read that little book. Simply by reading the Bible she had felt better.

It is one thing to witness about God's existence and that He wants to be our Father, but quite another to follow through with ministering and laying the foundation of a solid relationship. To leave someone to their own devices before establishing a good grounding would be unwise. I offered to pray for her. As a Christian working in the healthcare sector, it is often better to pray for someone than with someone. Jesus would often first heal the sick and then speak to the people afterwards. He first assessed their needs before starting a personal relationship with them. The hungry first need to be fed and only after their hunger has been satiated can a meaningful discussion take place. This is why God's healing and blessings often precedes a real encounter with Him. God had already begun this work in her without my knowledge. Then I prayed for the fear she was suffering. I sat next to her and laid my hand on her shoulder while interceding in prayer for her. As I

did this I became aware of an intense blessing which was directed at her inner healing. It was filled with compassion and love, greater than what I had ever felt for her. A week later I saw her again. She told me that she had cancelled her appointment to be admitted to a psychiatric institution, besides which the psychiatrist had, without any knowledge of what had taken place, drastically lowered the dosage of her medication. What I really noticed though were her eyes; they were no longer dull but shining! My patient had, on her own initiative, continued to read the Bible. It was then that we could go before the Lord in prayer and she consciously opened the door to her heart. Thus a real relationship with Him was formed. At our following meetings, her relationship with Him was central to our discussions - a relationship where she could take all her problems to Him as to a Father. As time passed, more and more traumatic experiences started to surface. Each time however God was there to touch her with his healing power and tangible love.

After four of these meetings she disappeared for a couple of months. I had referred her to a neurologist I knew to rule out a form of epilepsy. I was very busy at my practice and duly forgot about her. I got a phone call from someone who had seen her having a fit on a sidewalk. A day later she called on me and she told me that she was battling to overcome some terrible things that had taken place within the past few years. I wondered how much the spiritual foundation that we had laid in previous meetings meant to her. I also wondered if she, besides me providing her with medical care, still wanted me to provide her with pastoral care. After all, she had not been to see me for two months. After much discussion and probing, I asked her whether she had chosen to follow God to please me. She admitted that in the past few months, despite the fact that it had initially gone so well, something had changed. She seemed to struggle with reading the Bible, as if something was holding her back. I suggested that we no longer had these discussions, but I did invite her to attend one of the patient meetings. After a month she came to see me again. It seemed she had mulled over my suggestion and she had decided that she did indeed want to attend one of these meetings. I was so pleased, because now it seemed she wanted to open her heart to God, not for her doctor's sake, but for her own. By attending these meetings, she appeared more positive and seemed to blossom and her eyes were filled with joy.

From this we can deduce one of the ethical principals of a Christian working in the healthcare sector. One has to respect the patients' free will and freedom of conscience otherwise a degree of manipulation arises. On the other hand, you must not allow the patient to force you to do things that go against your own conscience. In between these two boundaries lies a vacuum that can, with some trust, allow for informal discussions of all the important facets of the patient's problems. It also provides the opportunity for discussing fundamental questions pertaining to our lives and our existence. Listening is more important than talking. There may be many things that you yourself are not sure about. But that which you do know without a doubt, the simple truth of what God, through Jesus Christ has done in your own life that you may share with conviction. How do people react to this? One group of people will show no interest and it is then better not to continue the discussion. There is another particular group who will stay with you for a while and then choose not to follow the gospel after all. They are the most difficult as they are searching for peace and inner joy in Jesus Christ yet are not open to change. Your profession as a physician makes people come to you for support and not to

have you make them confront reality. How blessed is the pastor who, in his position, is able to be more forthright. Unfortunately, a physician has to keep to abide by certain rules while consulting, should you not want to lose the person as a patient.

Then there are certain people who do find a spiritual foundation, but do not really want to be delivered of the psychological reasons that brought them to you in the first place.

Negative qualities in one's character and deep seated personality disorders are not easily changed. The scars of a severe psychosis for example remain, regardless of the peace you find in God and manifest itself in deviant behaviour. I have learnt to accept the slow pace of change. A continual process of gradual change often occurs after the patient has stopped calling on you. You have to accept that sometimes a person can experience an added dimension of spirituality yet remain ill or continue to suffer from psychological disorders.

This reminds me of a woman to whom I paid many house visits because she suffered from agoraphobia (a fear of open spaces) as well as various psycho-somatic complaints, insomnia, suppressed grief due to divorce, abuse etc.

After some time had passed, we were able to pray. The initial prayer was for the fear she had developed over the years. With every visit, I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Her agoraphobia I tried to treat with behavioural therapy. At last she was able to come to my surgery for our consultations. When she told me she no longer feared leaving her home because she knew the Lord Jesus was with her, it affected me all the more because she had initiated discussing the subject. This woman attended many patient gatherings (these are evenings arranged to accommodate people like this woman, who I felt were in need of fellowship). After six months of providing her with transport to these meetings, I began questioning her motives for attending; was she going due to her own convictions or out of feelings of obligation? I was later told by another patient that she was only attending these evenings as she did not want to offend me! On top of which she did not want it to be known to others that she was attending these meetings. It seemed she felt ashamed to be seen associating with Christians. She soon began devising reasons and arguments for not going. This was reason enough for me to let her go her own way and enabled me to analyse what she actually wanted to do with her life. Gradually she fell back into her original debilitating way of life, relying on others for help, focusing on her problems and living indoors.

Now, years later, it seems her life is yet again dominated by a pattern of dependency and isolation. Yet when I think of her I have total peace of mind, even though her visits are now purely to deal with her medical issues. I truly believe that there will be a profound change in her life and all the input has not been in vain.

What can be learnt from these encounters?

Firstly, we see how special God's love is, seeking out individuals, even when they are isolated or have psychological problems and would appear to be a lost cause in most people's eyes.

We experience the healing power of prayer and the blessing of learning to pray for oneself, or reading the bible.

But also that healing on its own is not sufficient. God wants us to be actively involved in his plan for our lives.

He stands back and waits, just like a father or mother would, until the child starts to crawl and walk. As with healing, we have also been given the power to us to enable us to do these things.

Coping with anxiety

We recently got together with a dozen or so patients for prayer and bible study. We discussed the miracles Jesus had performed in his day and how he was still performing them for those who believe in him today, people who live and stand in faith.

Faith is a gift to those who believe yet prayer needs to be applied to maintain this gift. At one point during the evening I asked if there were any needs or problems we could all pray for. One specific problem came to the fore, although it had not been mentioned once during the entire evening.

There were about six or seven people who were struggling to cope with anxieties and asked for prayer. This made me realise that more than half of those present were experiencing anxieties, and while discussing our faith and belief, these anxieties surfaced as irrevocable obstacles in their minds.

Because this problem occurs so often, it is the appropriate time to address this issue. Firstly we will hear how other Christians have learned to cope and overcome this problem. We'll also take a look at what the Bible says about this and how Jesus dealt with fear.

What is anxiety? It is an intensely oppressive emotional or spiritual sensation which affects our thinking, our way of life, our will and body. I feel there is no greater suffering for the soul than anxiety. It is a reaction from within to an outside threat. A threat from an external source which has become unbearable.

It may be pain, but also loneliness, the loss of something or someone, losing face, dying, losing control, a feeling of going insane – all things which affect our entire existence. In this group of patients, the majority suffered mainly from physical symptoms of fear: light-headedness, sweating, trembling and abdominal cramps. Some anxieties manifest as panic attacks where the sufferer runs from pillar to post.

Another form of anxiety experienced is when an unseen and unexplained fear takes hold of one's life and will not dissipate. Anxiety can also be situation related: outside on the streets, in your relationships, if you're on your own, in crowds or in confined spaces.

Anxiety is unbearable. It makes people take flight, to search for a solution.

I see many people in my surgery who suffer from this problem. If they could find a way of softening or making it bearable, they would take it. Often the situation is so unbearable and the patient so desperate, that you have to intervene with tranquilisers, taking into consideration the risk of the person becoming addicted to the medication.

The most important question is always: what is the origin of these anxieties. What initially caused them and why?

Although anxiety manifests itself in much same way in the majority of people, such as hyperventilation, each person's anxiety is different. To provide appropriate and adequate care, one needs to know why this fear exists.

1. Anxieties caused by traumatic childhood experiences:

Anxiety can be the result of a threatening situation experienced as a child. Women who suffer from anxiety have often experienced sexual harassment such as incest or rape. Psychological or physical violence experienced at the hands of parents or by one's peers at school - divorce or absence of a parent, a death within the family, childhood hospital admissions or a fire. These are terrible traumas for a child to bear.

2. Situation related anxieties:

Anxiety can be real, caused by a real threat. Violence, conflicts, imminent redundancy or anxiety caused by a fear of illness due to physical symptoms.

3. Debt induced anxiety:

Anxiety can also be caused by real problems. A man who had committed financial fraud called me as he feared being found out by the law. He was on the run and filled with fear and anxiety and appealed for my help in desperation. This brought to mind the fear and guilty conscience I had experienced when, as a youth, I too had committed base deeds. Fear of punishment and of the consequences of my acts remained with me daily, causing a tangible anxiety. I was living in a state of alertness which forced me to hide.

4. Anxieties brought on by questioning our existence:

One can trace collective anxieties back to the family or in a nation at war. There is however one anxiety that affects us all, the knowledge that we live, but not knowing the meaning of this life. Although this anxiety seldom surfaces, it is however very real. This can sometimes be brought on when suffering from depression. Philosophers write about it. Various religions try to provide the answer to no avail. The new-age movements with its various offshoots also try to analyse this enigma. Drug addiction can also be traced back to it. This is an area in which mankind feels lost and asks: does God exist or not and what is the purpose of my existence.

What does the Bible say about these anxieties?

The Bible lets its light shine in the hearts of those who do not know God. Restlessness and anxiety prevails and everything is overshadowed by the uncertainty they feel about the reason of their existence. Job 15:20 says 'The wicked man writhes in pain all his days.' Isaiah 48:21 'the godless know no peace.'

The person who does not know God has only himself or his fellow-man to turn to. Where can he turn when he faces a threat? A child can always turn to its parents. But who does an adult turn to - a partner or spouse? But they too do not know the answers. Then they call on their doctor, but the best he can do is offer a chemical solution, a modern form of suppression. Fear of one's existence should not be suppressed as it has something of great importance to impart to us.

Until the age of 22, I was not able to find the answers to my questions regarding my existence. I sought the answers by experimenting with various drugs, in relationships, in travel and attempting to solve this problem intellectually. This question felt like it was gradually choking me. No-one could provide the answer. I doubted I would ever find the answer even though I had given it my all. Even my political activities with which I hoped to change the world could not provide the answer. This anxiety regarding our existence is

the most challenging in a world without God. If there is no God, then there is also no-one who will listen to you, no-one to provide the answer when you cry out for one.

This was what my life was like until one morning when I clearly saw the cross of Jesus before me. Where a person who was sent by God suffered immensely, paving a way for me to find God - to clear the way to my heart. It was in that vision that my torment came to an end. A stream of peace flowed through my soul. There had been no intellectual answer to my question, yet I felt a tangible answer: God was here with me, He was real and cared for me. This incredibly wonderful feeling removed every fear that existed within me. There was no longer any reason to suffer these anxieties. His presence quelled the great restlessness and brought my struggle to an end.

This type of anxiety is only experienced by humans. Although we experience the same physical fear as animals, there is however another deeper fear that has to do with his self-consciousness and eternal spiritual existence.

This is a spiritual need that radiates out to God, the only one who is able to provide that security.

The core of my argument is that the source of many fears and depressive feelings can be attributed to our quest of finding answers for our existence.

When a person engages in a Father-child relationship with God through Jesus in a time of psychological crisis, a turnabout takes place which also enables Him to heal our other fears.

Psalms 107:6 fulfils this statement: 'He delivered them from their distresses.'

5. Fear of dying:

Although anxieties related to the fear of dying are carried within, this fear manifests itself as a real physical emotion.

According to Hebrews 2:15, mankind is, through his fear of death, doomed to a life of slavery. Fear of death causes many other negative emotions and feelings. Research into what we experience at the time of dying has not only shown how very real fear is, but also how these feelings are masked and interwoven with other emotions (denial, anger and depression). Fear of dying is one of the most severe forms of anxiety, not only on our deathbeds, but also when suffering from various illnesses, especially those who experience hyperventilation syndrome.

I often hear people say that they are not scared of dying, only of how they'll die. A statement made when one is not yet facing the possibility of imminent death.

Someone once said that it does not make a difference whether one believes or not, everyone experiences fear.

As a family practitioner I am often present when a patient is in the process of dying.

Often the patient shows signs of withdrawing contact with the outside world and seems to live in his own world. Who can tell what the person is experiencing? Fear is a phase in this process and causes the person to become restless. When someone who knows Jesus is dying, it seems that the person has already taken a step into heaven. It's as if his eyes have been shielded from the terror of death. It is unthinkable that as a human being you can cope with death unless God is the one at your side at the time of your dying. Is this what He desires, I wonder? Is something like that really possible? Jesus says that this is

indeed the case. He says that when we have God in us, we have eternal life. That is greater than death.

6. Fear in our spiritual lives:

Fear could have a demonic source. It is amazing how people who do not know God are often very aware of the spiritual forces that can negatively influence their lives. I often meet patients who have been actively involved in the occult and are sensitive to these things. Their homes seem filled with a dark, heavy presence which can also be felt on certain occasions and in some situations. How many people don't wake up in the middle of the night feeling as though there is someone laying in wait? Demons are no illusion. The bible tells us that they exist. I once had a patient whose friend died and consequently experienced being oppressed by voices and noises. It appeared her home had been bewitched. Upon meeting her in her home, her eyes were wild and she appeared anxious. She was not hallucinating and was communicating normally. I told her: 'if you allow Jesus into your heart, then God's promise that His Spirit which dwells in us is greater than any other power that can threaten us is yours to claim'. She agreed for us to pray together. Together we asked Jesus to come into her life. Immediately there descended a strong presence of light, the peace and power of God's Spirit. His Spirit filled her with such inner peace and rest that her eyes radiated calmness and the anxiety disappeared. The darkness was replaced with light.

But even as a Christian you are part of a tapestry woven with strife. Just like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we too have periods in our prayer life where we experience anxieties. How do you deal with anxiety when faced with it? It is important to note that this is not of God nor yourself, but from outside influences. Secondly, you must realise that in every spiritual battle victory is possible by counteracting with the opposite spirit. In this instance, the opposite of fear is the power of faith. Where there is faith there can be no fear. It is through faith that the fear of demonic powers are conquered because Jesus conquered evil. I recall a prayer session where a group of Christians were so engrossed in a session of prayer related to conflict, that a heaviness descended upon them. This continued until one of the older prayer members shouted out 'Jesus has conquered'. Immediately peace and victory descended on the prayer group. Another time I remember being so overwhelmed by a terrible spiritual fear, suffering such tremendous torment, that I could barely cope. My salvation came from a deep seated child-like faith that I had within me. There have also been times when it seemed my name would be dragged through the mud. God victoriously quelled the terrible tension and restlessness when I reached out to Him. There are so many examples where Christians have conquered fear by exercising their faith and surrendering completely to God. Jesus often preached about faith. The disciples became anxious and fearful as the boat rocked violently on the stormy sea. After Jesus had commanded the wind to die down, he asked them why they did not exercise their faith in a time of trouble. Jesus himself overcame his fears by submitting to God.

You're probably asking: 'How do I acquire that kind of faith?' Well, faith is a gift which we receive from God when we seek Him. It is then that God wholeheartedly embraces us as a loving father and it becomes impossible not to trust Him. Some will experience this unwavering faith immediately while others have to go through a process of growth. When

you seriously commit your life to God through Jesus Christ, you too will receive your share of faith.

7. Fear of suffering:

We become fearful when suffering illness. No matter how hard we try to deal with it, our body feels under constant threat. Fear primarily stems from a physical source when suffering is inevitable. For example, a person suffering from hyperventilation syndrome is controlled by fear of the onset of symptoms such as tightness and chest pain, palpitations, tingling limbs and attracting attention to oneself in case of fainting. It is said that man suffers more from the fear of imminent suffering than from the suffering itself. One's entire thinking and behaviour is controlled by trying to avoid those situations where these symptoms have occurred. This could for example be while out shopping, being surrounded by people or even just being outdoors. The person becomes socially isolated by staying indoors or becomes addicted to tranquillizers. Experiencing fear when suffering is imminent is the most common and most natural form of fear. A person who experiences fear in this regard does not need to reproach himself as this is normal. As a Christian doctor I have felt for many years that I have a message for these people. I feel especially drawn to them as I too have experienced this form of fear and can truly empathize with them. Christians who are persecuted also experience this fear. Fear of rejection by one's peers, losing face, fear of physical violence; in our democratic world these fears are minor compared to Christians who suffer persecution in some countries. God said we would not be tested beyond our endurance.

We must learn not to look at the greatness of the suffering, but at the greatness of God. When we realise the immense power God has to help us in our times of need and stay focused on Him, then it will be like viewing the threat through the reverse side of a magnifying glass. This is what Peter did when he walked on the waves with Jesus. God is truly capable of intervening supernaturally. Think about the three friends who were cast into the fire by king Nebuchadnezzar. God sent His angel to walk with them through the flames so they would not get burned.

When we perceive how God helps us in our times of need and suffering, we must believe that He will act in inimitable ways beyond our imagination.

This does not mean we will no longer suffer. Rather that the way we work through it, the inner strength to bear it, is His responsibility. God often provides solutions at the last minute. His timing is perfect. I have often experienced this in my own life. The strength to endure and finding a solution always came at the precise time - never ahead of time, but mostly on the day that I needed to resolve the problem. When faced with suffering, the content of our thinking is also important. Negative, defeatist thinking intensifies the feelings of fear. Thinking with a spirit of faith quells that fear. We must fill our thoughts with God's promises. God causes all things, even suffering, to work together for good to those who love Him. Romans 8:28. See what Jesus does just before his crucifixion.

Instead of feeling forsaken by God, He looks beyond His circumstances and gives God thanks that He is going to glorify Him. How else could He have survived that ordeal? You may ask yourself how we can compare ourselves with such heroes of faith or even with Jesus Himself. It was faith that conquered their fear. They have shown us how fear can be conquered. Why should we doubt it even if our faith is weak? If faith has the

power to conquer, then it is my wish that it is planted in our hearts, each according to his own measure of willingness.

Let us, after all this reflection, return to my patients. That evening, after everyone had been given the opportunity to share about the fears in their lives, we opened the bible. We shared all the promises that made fear unnecessary. We have learnt that prayer is a weapon against fear, so we prayed for one another.

Perhaps you are one of these people who are weighed down by fear and would like to pray this prayer as well:

Father, thank you that through Jesus you have conquered fear in certain circumstances: for people; for sickness; for death. Thank you that Christ lives in my heart, even in those places where I still experience fear. Thank you that 1 John 4:18 says that perfect love casts out fear and that you pour out that love in those areas in my heart through the Holy Spirit, so instead of fear, peace, courage and faith will grow.

Amen

Security

What strikes me when I meet people experiencing a crisis is a complete lack of security. I once had an overwrought man come to see me late at night. He had just come from the police station where, after an argument, he had been thrown out. He began by telling me that if I uttered one wrong word, he would not be held responsible for his actions. His girlfriend sat by watching helplessly. After a while he became less agitated and he said he felt let down by various agencies and departments which supposedly offered assistance to people like him. As he was leaving I shook his hand and he said “ I so desperately need someone to really listen to me and someone I can trust”. This really shocked me as I too had felt that desire for security.

The same thing happened to someone else I met. A young woman who suffered bouts of sadness which did not have an obvious cause. She also had an inability to sustain friendships. She lacked trust and did not feel ‘safe’ with others. It seemed to stem from her childhood as her parents did not provide her with a secure environment. This affected her whole life.

Again it was brought about by the longing for peace and security. There are people who have never, even as children, known that sense of security.

One only has to look at the vast number of children in Third World countries who are afflicted by poverty, a nation on the move trying to outrun the violence perpetrated against them, causing many children to become separated from their parents. But here at home we have the same problem. Children are abandoned by their parents or get put into foster care due to problems and misunderstandings within the home and never experience that safe environment. Some have become so accustomed to a life without security and have become so desensitized that an aimless existence on the streets and moving from shelter to shelter has become a normal way of life. This also causes psychological problems such as bouts of depression, anxiety or phobias. This is also evident in severely mentally ill patients. One of my female patients had suffered several episodes of

psychoses. In her life one again finds a broken relationship, this time with her mother which occurred at a very young age. I also meet people who have lived in a secure environment, but when losing a parent have had a complete breakdown.

I was treating a woman for depression and she told a similar story. Her father had been her rock, the one she turned to for advice. He had always been there to listen to her problems and gave her sound advice. She felt despair when he passed away. Who could she turn to now? Another woman who was so close to her father would discuss her problems with him in her mind. This seems to be normal human behaviour and this is apparent in many people dealing with the mourning process.

One of the characteristics of teenagers who leave home, is their desire to find this sense of security within their circle of friends. Feeling safe in a familiar environment of music, clothing and behaviour. Perhaps this is why so many young people experience psychological problems, because after leaving home this sense of security is lacking. It is a society where norms and values are diminishing and where marriage is no longer respected and where relationships are often fickle. A characteristic of the generation born after the second world war is that they shunned what used to be acceptable norms and behaviour: marriage vows, sexuality within those boundaries and the family unit. These values are no longer implemented as they don't seem to serve a purpose any longer. At the same time man is turning his back on God; the original architect of these norms. With the breakdown of these norms on the increase, the sense of security is diminishing. Life is lived aimlessly from day to day at the expense of security. In all the amusement, activity, discos, music, television, books and in other forms of keeping busy we can mask this existential feeling of insecurity. You can throw yourself into your work, although with the high rate of unemployment, this is no longer a possibility for many people. Boredom then sets in. In my practice I see many people who wrestle with this lack of security. They have become like driftwood, aimlessly floating about; without any moral anchor. They go from one crisis to the next, from one troubled relationship to the next. Tranquilizers, alcohol and the like mask the smarting pain. You meet people who live on the verge of panic, afraid of going crazy and losing control of oneself.

What has caused the Christian values of old to conjure up such negative feelings? I too felt this way when I was in my late teens. It feels like being constrained by a straightjacket sent from up above, feeling trapped by rigid laws. What should be giving feelings of security actually feels like bondage. God is so far-away and you only see the dogmatic aspect of His church. The church is failing in leading young people back to God. As a Christian physician I notice the things; at the same time I see God has the solution. It is at the cross of Jesus where this fundamental 'being lost', this inner lack of feeling safe, can be put to rest. It is here that every person is drawn into the safety of the Father's presence. It is here that the alienation of self and the world disappears. It is here that we come home and experience a renewal from within. To many this may sound implausible, but I have witnessed this miracle in countless patients. The wonderful power of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is able to do what generations of philosophers, psychiatrists, psychologists and other professionals have not been able to do accomplish. He is able to make a person whole again, taking him to the source of his existence and in

harmony with his Creator. God was crucified with Jesus – a horrific death sentence – and bore our perverted deeds, our negative thoughts and our anger. He conquered the negative power of everything that went against his love and by doing so redeeming our debt. Our minds find it difficult to comprehend and for the heart of a person who turns to him, of utmost importance. This is remarkable as God imprints his laws and morals in our hearts; not under duress, but a powerful guideline for living a blessed life. Not safe and trapped, but safe and free in a glorious union with that loving God.

When patients encourage one another

For many years patients have been meeting in our home to study the Bible, singing the latest edifying gospel songs and praying for one another's problems, often with the laying on of hands. They also spend the getting to know one another, thereby building friendships and in depth discussions take place sometimes lasting till the early hours of the morning. The group varies from anywhere between ten and twenty people. Looking back, I know it was God Himself who initiated these gatherings. He saw the need and importance of these meetings and I felt led by Him to open my home for this purpose, so that the patients with whom I had established a pastoral relationship could meet other Christians, encourage one another and also to have fellowship to quench their spiritual hunger. Just as the widow who Elijah met at the gates of the city of Zarephath, I too had to fill my home with jars, so that God could also fill my jars with the living oil of the Holy Spirit. While I prepare for these evenings, I am continuously reminded that it is Jesus Christ Himself who will lead us; that people come to have fellowship with Him and one another and that His Holy Spirit is present in our living room. This is after all God's promise that where two or more are gathered together in His name, He is in their midst (Matthew 18:20).

This important fact and the positive feedback from my patients was sufficient justification to continue having these meetings. Time and again we have witnessed that this is not just an empty promise, but that God is a tangible presence in the peace and joy that flows through each person present and in the power and faith given to us in great measure during our prayer sessions. Their euphoric singing lifts their spirits above their painful and worrying circumstances, when, just a short time earlier, they walked in bent under the weight of terrible burdens, some needing to unburden themselves to me before we enter the room for our praise and prayer session. They are freed from the pressure of their personal lives as they come to meet with the Lord. This is the secret of the gospel: God is at the head of our circumstances, Jesus takes our sins and bears them on His shoulders. This opens the door to enable us to have communion with Him through our faith in His resurrection. There are many in the group who have no in-depth knowledge of the many theological questions which tends to cause so much strife. They arrive feeling heavily burdened yet somehow discover a new dimension of peace and strength. They arrive feeling heavily burdened and then seem to find a new dimension of peace and power. They find themselves relaxing when in reality their lives are filled with tension. Meeting Jesus changes their lives. They find renewed strength to carry on with their lives. They leave behind their isolated lives by making new friends. What a privilege to witness such wonders.

There have been many people in the past who belonged to this group. Some were Christians who no longer had fellowship and had been isolated. For some it was a stepping stone to joining a Christian congregation. For many this was their introduction to the gospel. We were amazed at how the group evolved. We started out with two patients in 1982. One had a history of psychiatric problems. God confirmed the need for these meetings by mightily touching him with the Holy Spirit. One year later the group had grown to 25 people. I started questioning whether it was still possible to maintain the personal closeness and confidence we had found in each other when sharing our problems and blessings.

What is the secret of having one of these patient groups?

The problem with the health care system is that they do not understand that many depressions, fears and psychosomatic illnesses are caused because solid spiritual foundations are lacking.

What I have discovered is that in these situations the inner spiritual emptiness, the feeling of being lost, is laid bare and that as a Christian doctor I have to be involved in that dimension of their lives as well.

Our suffering in the physical sphere, within the family, in the work place and in other areas of our lives, shakes our apparent security and places us in unfamiliar situations which then disables us. Suddenly you have ample free time to reflect on your life and are inundated with feelings which are otherwise suppressed. You start searching for something familiar to hold on to to give you the peace and rest you so desperately need. Many people in this situation visit their doctor who treats, supports and encourages the patient, providing a sense of security. What happens when the crisis has passed, the suffering has eased and become more bearable and the difficult circumstances have been forgotten? Has anything been learned? Has the person grown stronger enabling him to better withstand another crisis? Often this is not the case. I see people who still bear the scars years later. They have been broken by all the suffering. They continue using tranquilizers, suffer from insomnia or once again experience problems. Some people suffer a break down because they are sapped of energy and depression looms again. Where could you possibly find the strength and courage to continue living?

God is continuously looking for people who have no anchor in their lives. He who seeks God in a time of need is wise indeed. Experiencing God's presence in your time of dire need is something you will never forget. This is when you have found a Helper, His power strengthens you from within, you hold your head up again. It is only then that you have triumphed and beaten the crisis. When future problems arise, you will know you are not alone and you will triumph. This is the secret of having patient group meetings: there is room for this process to develop. This is the heart of the matter and the meaning to everything they are involved in.

Each evening has a biblical theme which is studied and this can often lead to mutual discussions.

It can also create the opportunity for a group discussion where various people share their personal experiences of their walk with God and of their faith. The stories are not all positive, but have one thing in common which is how God worked his miracle in their lives. For example an ex-alcoholic will share his experiences with the wife of a man who has a drink problem. Or someone will share how God healed her heart which had been filled with hate.

Such diverse experiences shared freely in a relaxed environment. People have the opportunity to release their pent up emotions, allowing their sorrow to surface. People showing empathy and embracing one another. But also convivial times filled with laughter, enjoying music and drinking coffee together.

I too have learned a lot from these evenings!

I have discovered that God's grace blesses these evenings. I feel weak and inadequate before people start arriving and then all at once I feel the anointing of the Holy Spirit. After spending some time praying for one patient, the gift of faith is suddenly released within the group, a faith that can move mountains.

Then the process of studying the Bible in everyday language starts and also the importance of fasting and praying before our meetings. We learn how praise and worship paves the way for God to pour out His Holy Spirit. How one feels spiritually drained after one of these evenings yet at the same time drawing strength from the fasting and praying before hand.

Without this circle of patients I would feel inadequate as a Christian doctor, because besides the conventional medical care, I would not know how to provide for their spiritual needs if I did not hold these meetings. For many people taking the step to attend a church is just too great. You cannot expect people to attend or join a church if the church does not minister to their needs. This is why this work is an inherent part of the healthcare system as we know it. There are however many facets to this system that require more than mere medical care. I have fortunately realised that this work is an integral part of a person's wellbeing and it is wise to seek support from those who provide pastoral care within the community and to seek their counsel. In this way the onus for their wellbeing is shared by many and not by just one individual.

Friendship with Jesus

The seventy year old man before me looked so poorly, his breathing shallow and laboured. His condition was critical and we both knew he was dying. I was a thirty five year old doctor who came from a background where I had the option of furthering my education. He had been a labourer who came from a working class family. The day before we had been reminiscing about such things as the Van Ostadebuurt where so many Jews had lived until they had been forcibly removed during the war. I felt such sympathy for this man. He remained cheerful and jovial. His wife could barely cope with the situation but she tried to make him as comfortable as possible although at times he was hard work. She could accept this though considering he was dying.

A year earlier I had gently tried to broach the subject of dying and the gravity of his diagnosis. I asked him how he perceived dying and whether he had any expectations. I could tell he found it a difficult subject to discuss. But a God? No, he could not grasp the concept of there being a God. He had however been touched by an incident that took place in the hospital. When he had been admitted to the respiratory ward he became acquainted with the patient in the next bed. They had had many discussions and shared their life's experiences and become firm friends. On the day his friend died, he said it felt as if he was beside him experiencing the whole dying process with him. It seemed as if he had been destined to comfort and be with him to the end. He was overwhelmed by the

whole experience. Now, a year on, it was he who was going through the dying process. He was terminally ill as operations and medical intervention had not been successful. This was his final journey, going home to die with his wife at his side. Time had flown and although I had visited with him many times since his illness began, I was still anxious about him when he left this world.

I had experienced God's existence in a mighty way and now this congenial man was going to die never knowing about Him and not knowing about life after death. Jesus said: "In my Father's house are many mansions". How wonderful if he too could go to where there was no more sorrow, pain or death. How I would love to meet him there one day. At home I prayed and did not really know how to approach him. My courage failed me as he was always surrounded by family members and I felt I could not broach the subject. He was by now experiencing tightening of the chest which made a two-way discussion difficult. "Father, please give me wisdom if it is Your will for me to tell him about Jesus".

Today I went to visit him again. His time was fast coming to an end. God told me that the time had come for me to have that talk with him. I felt confused. What should I tell someone who was so close to death? "Lord, then please let his family leave the room so I can talk to him on my own". I should rather not have asked for this as his room immediately filled up with loved ones! Yet I had to speak to him. If I passed up this opportunity I would forever regret it. I lay my hand on his shoulder. I recalled what he had told me a year ago.

"Do you remember telling me about your friendship with that patient last year and how much your friendship meant to him. Now you too find yourself in that situation, I need to tell you that right now there is someone who also wants to be your friend and his name is Jesus. He does not leave you once you pass away and will be safe in His arms. Would you like to accept Jesus right now? Will you allow Him to be your friend?"

When he nodded I prayed for him. I prayed for comfort, for forgiveness and for strength. His family were all in tears as they experienced so many emotions, not only sadness for their loss, but I feel sure they too felt what was happening.

This week I spoke to his widow. It is now a year since he passed away and I recall that memorable afternoon that had so profoundly touched me. I could never have imagined the importance of the all that happened that day. I wondered whether I would one day be reunited when I went to be with Jesus. Then she told me how in his last days he felt fulfilled and yearned to pray together. This has truly blessed me.

This is friendship: it builds bridges and holds out its hand to those who are lonely and dying. It also reaches down from heaven to those who seek Him. Jesus was indeed a friend to him just as he is to me. The friendship that God wants to have with us is stronger than death. He wants to befriend not only those who lead an exemplary life, but also with the outcasts of society, for those who have reached a dead-end.

The friendship that Jesus had for us was so great that He gave His life for us. This is the genuine friend that He is. Maybe you too have been are or going through a difficult time, just as my patient did. Do you want to give friendship with Jesus a chance? At one time God looked down on mankind and saw the darkness in their lives. Their lives were marked by hatred, sorrow and they had lost their way. It caused Him great sorrow

because these were His children who were destroying their lives. He called on Jesus and made Him a friend to these people, a friend to the young and old. He sent Him to restore the bond we had with our Father, lifting the burden that they were carrying.

Jesus became our friend and after paving the way, our brother. God's friends were welcomed and adopted into His family thereby claiming their right to dwell in His home not just for a day, but for all eternity.

Loneliness and friendship

A dear friend of mine who had become ill came to my surgery yesterday where I examined him. To my consternation I diagnosed a large tumor in his stomach. I knew we were facing a difficult time and I would stand by him as a friend and as his doctor. I would visit him a few times a week and we would pray for his recovery. His faith was a lot stronger than mine. Then one day I receive that dreaded phone call informing me of his passing. I seemed to see him smiling down at me from the clouds. I knew he had gone to a much better place, yet I suffered tremendous sadness for many months. It drained me and brought home once again how important friendship really is and how awful it must be to have to carry such a burden on your own. People come to depend on you thinking you can cope, not realising that you too are carrying a heavy burden which drains you.

A while later I went through a similar experience. My mother-in-law, who had been my faith partner for fourteen years, had passed away. For weeks on end I experienced feelings of sadness as I relived old memories. One morning I woke up with a well known Dutch hymn written by Eduard Gerdes on my heart, "A sweet name rustles amongst the clouds, no name is sweeter and better for the heart, that is a sweet balm for our wounds and heals all our sorrows". That same evening I received a letter from a friend who lived far away. "Look only to Jesus, just as the disciples did on the mountain". And that's what you try your best to do, to look to Jesus and not at the person who you're missing and is now home with the Lord.

Eventually I do succeed in looking to Jesus and my heart is filled with such power that lifts me out of the depths of despair. What a lesson to learn to trust in Him. One hymn's words are so apt, 'When friends leave us, what a friend we have in Jesus'. He will never forsake us as will our friendship with Him. When friends leave us our heavenly Friend will always be there! I was once in a gathering with thousands of Christians, praising and worshipping Him, arms raised and singing from my soul. Our focus was on God. He was present in His glory and power and living waters filled our hearts. It is a day of encouragement and power. During the service the image of a person appears before me. He is walking up a rocky, steep mountain. He is alone and carrying a cross. What a lonely walk and what a heavy burden to bear. But then you realise it's the image of your own life. You yearn to be surrounded by friends. Jesus also longed to have friends to walk the lonely road to the cross of Calvary with Him. One day God spoke to me: "If you truly want to follow Me, if you want to spread the good news, you too will come to stand alone. You will be lonely and rely only on me, but you will be kept safe". It is certainly difficult and is the dilemma of the Christian life. Many Christians follow this road of needing to be surrounded by friends. But it seems that you can fellowship in a church for many years and never make one friend. One of my patients told me that they had belonged to a Pentecostal church for eight years and barely knew the other Christians in the church. Unbelievable! Jesus is the epitome of friendship, he laid down His life for

them. Yet only a few were stayed loyal to Him and were worthy of His friendship. Can we be such worthy friends to our fellow christians? Do we go the extra mile for our friends? Or are we individualists who deny our longing for friendships? Are we loyal, or is it a case of out of sight, out of mind?

Four years ago we started going on holidays with other christian families. Many evenings are spent sharing and talking under the French night sky. It is now quite a few years ago that my other friend passed away. At that time I had prayed to God to bless me with like-minded, loyal and loving friends. I experience such joy spending time with these wonderful people where I can relax and be myself. It reminds me of Bunyans brilliant allegorical novel *The Pilgrim's Progress* of the friendship between Christian and Faithful. After Faithful dies a martyr's death, Christian meets Hopeful who takes Faithful's place as his friend.

The perfect friend, precisely the one he needed. We also see examples of these perfect friendships in the Bible such as the one between David and Jonathan. If we open ourselves up to Him, He will bless us with these friends. He asks us to give friendship as well. If a community of christians is built on a foundation of true friendships, little can go wrong. Genuine spiritual friendship is priceless.

'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!' (Psalm 133:1).

God desires that we too have this bond with each other so that nothing can destroy it. This is when his Holy Spirit can get to work and miracles will follow. It is then that outsiders will be touched and brought into the fold. I can still remember how I felt when as a 21 year old I attended a christian meeting. I entered at a whim, dressed in black with shoulder length hair and wearing knee length boots. I was so filled with anger and aggression, but the warmth of the love that enveloped me as I entered that gathering was so intense that it actually caused me to feel physical pain. This is what you too can expect where friendships in Christ exist. It is inviting and people get saved. Surely that is what life is after all about.

Something wonderful and special has started to blossom in my practice. Some patients have become more than mere patients. Often through some remarkable occurrence and a tangible intervention by God in difficult circumstances has caused them to become my spiritual friends.

It has forged an indestructable bond.

He leads me beside quiet waters (Psalm 23:2)

Descending to the depths

A full vessel – the rebirth

A man walks by the water, his eyes searching. He looks like someone who works the land. Then his eyes fall on an old battered, leaking bucket. He pensively studies the bucket, turning it round in the sunlight. Eventually he decides to take it home.

The following day he is back beside the water. He carries what looks like a new, shiny bucket. All the dents have gone and he has lovingly repaired it and polished it till it

shone. He immerses it into the river and pulls out a bucket of sparkling, clear water. He then walks over to his fields and pours the water on his crops. He continues doing this until all the plants have been saturated. The day has ended and he walks home carrying his bucket on his shoulder.

A man who lives in a big city sits in a room filled with people. There are young, old, well dressed and some poorly dressed people in the group. Their eyes are focused on a table in the centre of the room. On it is a bowl filled with water. The man holding the meeting gets up holding a new cup in his hand. "Look", he says, "this perfect cup is the new person. That is what happens to your life when you accept Jesus into your heart. He washes away all the filth and heals all the cracks. The cup is filled with a little water. This is the goodness that God puts in us. If the cup were broken, all the water would leak out. But fortunately Jesus has made it whole so it can contain this water. You can drink from it if you want.

He floats the half full cup on the water and it turns in the ripple.

Then he plunges the cup into the water.

"The bowl is the image of Jesus. The water is the Holy Spirit and Jesus is filled with His Spirit. They belong together, the bowl and the water.

They are compatible. The cup disappears beneath the water and when it is held aloft, water gushes over the sides.

"This is the image of the baptism of the Spirit," he says "This is God's purpose for our lives. Water in overflowing, water to satisfy the world, water for us, but in such abundance, that it washes over all those around us." The people bow their heads in silent prayer; the room is filled with the warm presence of the Holy Spirit Who seeks a resting place in all our hearts and He pours out His Spirit on those who are ready for it.

In front of an enormous house a long line of recruits stand patiently waiting to enrol. At the door a man with the appearance of an army officer runs his finger down the pages in front of him. He registers all their names and asks each in turn the same question; "Are you prepared?" and then wishes them well.

The faces of the recruits display an unexpected determination. It is war time and the troops have been mobilized. They have left behind loved ones and their homes and this releases a lot of emotion. But now they are here and the die is cast, there is no turning back.

"Are you prepared?" the man behind the desk asks; he is answered with a nod of the head. Pandemonium has broken loose inside the barracks. Many men are crowded around the distributing the uniforms and weapons. Without these they cannot fight a war. Each is supplied his provisions and they try on their uniforms and test their weapons.

At the other end of the building a group of soldiers wearing their uniforms, boots, helmets and holding their weapons have gathered. Nothing is left to chance, they are well protected against the elements.

A truck transports them to the training camp. They seem determined to succeed because they are fighting for their country and the freedom of their families.

This is the image that comes to mind when I think of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is calling you to enter His country, to fight for His Kingdom. One day you wake up in the Kingdom of

God. A new world opens up to you. You have accepted the offer of salvation; you have passed through the narrow gates. Then the time comes for you to mature where you learn to live according to the new laws of His Kingdom. You keep growing in maturity and then you are called to be an active soldier for Jesus; without the special armour though, it's not possible. This is why Jesus baptises you in the Holy Spirit, so you are clothed with authority; this is how you can join the battle to the glory of the King. This is the image of the baptism of the Spirit and fire the Bible tells us about.

A tired, looking man sits by a well. His body and clothes are covered with dust and he is very thirsty. He sees a woman bent over slightly carrying a large pitcher. Jesus addresses her. "Can you give me some water to quench my thirst?" After He had drunk the water He said to her: "If you knew who you have given the water to, you would have asked me for the water that never lets you thirst again." She is surprised and He wonders if she understood?

We see this man again, this time standing on a mountain. He is surrounded by multitudes of people. He calls out: "If there is anyone who is heavy laden, come to me and I will give you rest. If there is anyone who is thirsty, come drink freely from the living waters." Thousands get up to go to Him. He lays his hand briefly on every shoulder. He shares from His Spirit and fills them with living water. Some people shed tears of joy, children jump around; something amazing and unique is happening. God has spoken; all of creation has been renewed.

One day this man hangs on a cross. His blood streams from his body, his life slowly fading away. He sacrifices his life for his friends so they could be filled with His life, a new divine life. Eternal life with God; a life stronger than death.

The new birth and baptism in the Holy Spirit

What is this new life like? It is like an expectant mother. The seed has been planted and she is impregnated. Every word spoken by God that we receive penetrates our heart and plants the seed of the new life. The sowing continues. You dwell on the Word. Time and again we are reminded of the new life that has begun to live in us.

We are still not sure how to apply it to our lives. Faith is however growing unnoticed, even though sometimes it doesn't seem to be doing so. After a while the time has arrived for the birth.

Every new birth in the Kingdom of God is coupled with the manifestation of the magnificence of the Father. It is a life-changing experience, and just as a child starts developing by recognising his parents and various sounds and sees light, so too is this characteristic of the rebirth, the experience and awareness of this new life in the Spirit. We begin to see His light, hear His voice, tune in to all things Godly. Knowing He is with you; no longer only believing with the mind but experiencing things with your heart and soul. Meeting with Jesus continually.

An experienced architect unfolds his blueprint. He had an enormous task ahead of him. The whole city was going to be rebuilt. A new foundation had to be laid to prevent any further subsidence. Many of the streets and houses lay in ruins and were uninhabitable.

The time had arrived for this massive project to start. The plans had been completed and approved. The best builders in the trade had been employed; only the best contractor was good enough!

This is the Father's attitude towards the world. It would be an enormous task, but a new foundation had to be laid upon which a strong, unbreakable and eternal cornerstone could be built. This is necessary before He can implement His detailed plan for us – a new spiritual foundation. That foundation is God's own Spirit from which each person who believes in Jesus is born.

For it says in 1 John 3:9: "No one who is born of God practises sin." Every person who is born of the Spirit is a new creation. They are born from the same Spirit in harmony with God and each other. Through Jesus this Spirit is able to enter all those who open themselves to Him. This is the miracle of the new birth.

Where and how do you receive rebirth?

At the cross of Calvary where Jesus of Nazareth died for your and my sins, He settled our debt with God.

If you believe this; open yourself to Him, seek Him as all those who were burdened and heavy laden did. Let Him wash your sins away and purify your life. Let God make something beautiful of your life, just as the new cup and bucket. Destined to be filled to overflowing with water from the river of God's love. You will experience unimaginable blessings. Everything will be different, you will never again be the same, you will become an instrument to help others.

The new birth and the filling of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. They are an extension of each other.

This causes quite a lot of confusion. Am I born again? Have I been baptized in the Holy Spirit? Are they the same thing? Or is there a difference. With the afore-mentioned short analogies regarding these two wonderful facets of a christian life, I set about hoping to clarify them.

No-one can be baptized in the Holy Spirit if he has not been reborn of the cross. A broken bucket holds no water; only restoring it is not enough. Having a relationship with God, knowing Him as your Saviour and Redeemer is the most important aspect of being a Christian. But there is more to it than this. God wants to empower you with His Spirit, thereby enabling Him to work through you. This is after all the distinguishing feature of Jesus' life, He was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. How can we follow Jesus without God's anointing on our lives?

In a world so hostile towards God, a world where the devil manifests itself through the occult amongst others, we need more than ever a church which has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Millions of christians pray the Lord's prayer: "For Thine is the kingdom, and THE POWER forever." How else can the Kingdom pave the way in the midst of unbelief but through power. There are christians who claim that they don't need these heavenly blessings when they follow Christ. They are afraid of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and are quick to point out the times in history where heresy and spiritual discord has occurred. There are even people who perceive praying in the Spirit as unbiblical. Yet Paul explicitly writes about it. Denying the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a necessary tool for all christians to remain strong in the faith is a clever trick of the enemy of God. So

through lack of knowledge God's people will lose their way. To summarise: a bucket only has bottom and the cup contains merely a few drops, too few to quench a person's thirst and the soldiers go off to war without their armour.

In my own life the baptism with the Holy Spirit has been extremely important. At a time of crisis in my life, when I met Christ as my personal saviour, I experienced a wonderful time of joy. Forgiveness, darkness replaced by light and the word of God began to have true meaning. The resistance was great, animosity from past friends and things from my past which haunted me. Although I experienced forgiveness, light instead of darkness and had the word imprinted on my heart, the power I should be experiencing was lacking. There was still something amiss.

During those first months I came to a decision to become a disciple for Jesus. With the absence of human interference I was overwhelmed by a powerful, heavenly force and was completely filled with power. I surrendered to this wonderful baptism of power flowing over me. The power of the Holy Spirit was a true revelation to me. I was in awe of this experience which I had never thought possible. Since that time, the Holy Spirit flows like a fountain through me when I seek Him in prayer. The living water flows and overflows. When I pray for others it seems like I am a channel of God's love. The most incredible things happen. God showed me which spiritual gifts He wanted me to use through His Spirit, and also where and when they were to be applied. For instance in relation to other christians, but also in the firing-line, relating to people who have problems. One of the easiest of the gifts to implement was speaking in tongues. Although this gift is absent in some Spirit-filled christians' lives, this first gift of the Holy Spirit is priceless as it is a tremendously powerful weapon in the spiritual battle. (More can be read in chapter 111 'praying in the spirit').

The law of surrendering oneself

I once met a patient who had been put on sick leave due to work related stress. As I got to know him better, it seemed that not only did he suffer from his problem at work, but also with self doubt. As an orthodox christian he had been taught that only the chosen few would be saved. The consequence was that for all his christian life he had been heavily burdened causing his depression and doubt. It was extremely difficult to make him accept and believe God's promise. It was obvious that he believed in Christ, but he doubted whether his faith was sufficient for him to be saved.

The bible says "For if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him up from the dead, you shall be saved". (Romans 10:9). This means that if I verbally confess that Jesus is my Lord and Saviour and that He reigns over me and that I will follow and obey Him as well as believing that He has risen from His death on the cross, and believe this is God's promise, then I will be saved. Well, that latter he believed without a doubt, but he had never confessed Jesus as his saviour. This is wanting in many people who may have attended the church for many years. They have never said: "come into my life Lord and reign over it", consciously submitting their lives to Him. There are indeed many who believe but live with a spirit of doubt because they have never completely submitted their lives to Him. Submission does not mean living under the rule of a distant God and following his commandments, but

making a personal choice, having a relationship with Him. The law of surrender means that God is the master of our lives and that we surrender to His authority.

This is one of the basic principles in the lives of a Christian. This law is a prerequisite that needs to be instilled in our lives before spiritual growth can take place.

This is a process and does not happen just by confessing Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. How many people do you know who have made this confession and yet a short while later carry on with their old worldly lives?

We need to go through many experiences before surrender to God is a law and foundation in our lives. It may even seem like you are experiencing many conversions, instead of only once.

In my own life there came a time that I turned to the Lord and he did not turn me away (John 6:37 “and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out”). Some time later I made my choice to follow Jesus public knowledge and He baptized me mightily with His Spirit. Then I lay my life before Him to use me as an instrument where He saw fit. Some call this moment in our lives dedication. I surrendered more of my worldly life and He broke the inner resistance that I still carried. Then God taught me the law of surrender in the spiritual battle. He taught me that I need to surrender to Him in the face of all adversity, instead of making feeble excuses. He also taught me how to deal with lies and false criticism by giving it all to Him. We are continually reminded of our act of surrendering.

The need to surrender every burden brings you continually face to face with Jesus. There is just no other way. There is also no other way to conserve the peace and harmony in our lives, which is what surrendering to Him does. In the beginning surrendering is almost impossible, but with time it becomes an automatic way of life in the child of God. It becomes like breathing in our physical lives, something vital at the centre in our lives with God. The longer we live our lives in Jesus, the easier and we take it for granted. The last few years He has taught me what it means to give up your life as a sacrifice. More surrender. Jesus' life was no different. His baptism in water was surrendering to God; His way of dealing with personal suffering was surrender. If He was taunted and verbally abused, he ignored it and if He suffered did not threaten, but handed it over to Him who is just (1 Peter 2:23). Just as in Gethsemane where he was doomed to die, he surrendered and accepted the will of the Father.

Now that Jesus has left this example for us, would we choose to go a different way? To those who still doubt I would like to say: “Take the step, surrender yourself to God's authority.” To those who know Jesus, I'd like to say “Be prepared for God to bring you to the point of greater surrender”. And to pastoral workers: “be aware that God wants to bring your client to greater surrender in times of trouble. Be aware of this simple law of the Kingdom of God, which is so vital for our spiritual growth”.

Not being able to surrender

It is easily said - surrender, but that is exactly where my problem lies.

I had a conversation with a woman who was haunted by her past which caused her much pain. How to proceed? You know it is necessary and you are willing to deal with the problem, but it's not always successful. To truly surrender one's life is not easy.

Giving to God the things that hinder you often means letting go of these things; you want to let go, but it won't let go of you.

Nevertheless, God's promise says "pardon and you will be pardoned" (Luke 6:37). This is then also a process.

It is wise to simply say to God: "I have trouble letting go and handing my problems over to you. Will You do the work on my behalf thereby enabling me to truly let go?" My experience is that God will do it, regardless of the terrible circumstances. He often does it in such an unobtrusive way that you are suddenly aware that you have been freed from these burdens. You can then truly leave them behind.

Our will in the walk of faith

A half-hearted will.

Jesus is rather radical when calls on those around Him. He forces those listening to Him to make a choice either for or against Him. In Matthew 8:21 we read of a man who says "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." Jesus answers "Follow me and allow the dead to bury their own dead." Again in Matthew 10:38 He says "and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." In other words: if you follow Me you will have to accept a certain amount of suffering, you will have to accept that you will sometimes face spiritual battles, that you have to deny yourself and let things go even when it is unjust. This is the difficult commandment, answering hate with love and to be there for those friends. If you can't do these things, then you can actually not follow me.

He actually says: "The way that I have paved for you is inescapable and if you ultimately want to end up with your Father, then there is no easy route". He's really saying: choose and follow me, but realise it isn't easy.

Jesus tests our motivation. What do we actually want?

He knows that half-hearted choices are doomed to fail, that a person who chooses to become a Christian only to receive blessings and not to work towards righteousness, will fall by the wayside when the going gets tough.

Jesus tests the power of our motivation; are we prepared to give up everything, even our own lives? He says in Matthew 10:39 "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it". God tests every Christian's commitment to be led by Him.

God continually places us in situations which make the choice we made to follow Him clearer. Our relationship with Him continues to deepen and grow.

This is not just about a conscious choice of the will and mind, but also to see whether a person truly possesses the desire to serve God.

The problem for many people who follow God stems from their half-hearted commitment. Often it is only a phlegmatic commitment made to follow Him, barely realising what one is doing and why; not from a genuine choice from the heart.

I once had a patient who I regularly visited for a couple of years treating her for her physical and psychological problems. The loss of her father and her divorce were the focus of her life.

In time we developed a trustworthy relationship and one day we had a discussion about the meaning of life and many other topics. One day Christ came into the discussion and she decided to ask Him into her life and see whether He could change her life. This

development was totally unexpected and I waited with bated breath to see what God was going to do in her life.

After a few months I could see that she had more strength, her psychological state was improved and she had found her zest for living once again.

Yet there was still a problem. She could not pray to God in Jesus' name. On the contrary, it seemed she was holding on to her own father. This obsession with her father dominated her life and she could not put Jesus first in her life. Her desire to follow Jesus remained superficial. Consequently her inner turmoil remained unsolved. God had so much comfort to give, if only she would put her trust in Him. It makes you feel so powerless and feel frustrated to have to admit you had expected a lot more; that someone's motivation to really get to know Jesus is only superficial.

Jesus also felt frustrated. Many people sought him to deliver them from their physical pain and suffering, or to witness a miracle, yet all the while not really being interested in knowing Him. They did not believe that God sent His only Son to sacrifice His life for us bringing about our reconciliation with God. People were prepared to listen to Him, being very excited about witnessing miracles, yet they still did not have an in depth relationship with Him. There were however a few who truly loved Him and stayed loyal to Him till the end. Like John and Mary, who stood at the cross. Jesus still experiences frustration today as even when He heals someone either physically or mentally, He still receives a warm reception, an unthankful attitude.

From this I have learnt to be careful when testing a person's commitment to Him. This is because sound spiritual care from God will not be possible and there is a chance that the pastoral care may also experience problems. There is also a chance that you can create more problems for the individual. Does the Bible not say what happens if you have a lukewarm relationship with God? The end result being worse than it was at the beginning. (2 Peter 2:22).

The many faces of the unwilling spirit

The first part of this book deals with the power behind a person's motivation to take a stand for God. Now I will touch on a various problems within the spiritual care community. A half-hearted will is dangerous, but there are other attitudes that can hinder personal deliverance.

One of these attitudes is self-pity; not wanting total healing and an unwilling attitude to really listen to God.

Self-pity is soul-destroying and a real problem. I knew a woman who had to deal with a lot of heartache - a life full of disappointments and failures. Yet the root problem was that she could not let go of her traumatic past and continued to look back at the negative things that had happened to her. This gave depression a foothold.

She was a Christian and I suggested that Jesus clearly says we need to let go of the past. He says in Luke 9:62: "No one, after putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." I prayed that God would help her completely submit herself to Him and to conquer her spirit of self-pity. I also had a patient who I had visit at home because she suffered from agoraphobia. She had been raised catholic and a pastoral relationship developed. Even though she opened her heart to Jesus and received

forgiveness, there was still a problem. She continued to bemoan her lot and reproaching other people. Self-pity and reproaching go hand in hand. No matter how I tried, I could not get through to her.

This caused a standstill in her spiritual growth. One of the biggest hindrances in medical support and care is the lack of motivation in patients, like an alcoholic unwilling to give up his drink and a drug addict choosing the easy way out and living a life of addiction. It is like the young patient who suffers from a psychological development problem and continuously falls out with others; he goes from one psychotherapist to the next without being healed, because he is not motivated enough. Receiving the attention from health practitioners may feel more rewarding than being completely healed and having to stand on one's own two feet. It is because of this that many therapies fail.

The gospel also experienced this problem.

When Jesus asks the blind man what he wants (Luke 18:41), even though He knew he had come to be healed, He was testing his will and faith. He makes the man speak out loud. He no longer wants to be blind!

I see a lot of people who come to my surgery with their problems.

Even though we work on the problem, the patient holds back and is not totally healed. Or he slips back into his old ways. An inner conflict of not wanting to let go of the past takes place. I made the mistake of spoon feeding patients and not letting them help themselves as well, thereby causing an unhealthy dependency on me. We need to guide people yet at the same time giving them the space to first come to the decision of wanting to be healed. This means letting go, although this could mean backsliding. In all probability though, he will return more motivated than before. Standing on one's own two spiritual feet is an inherent part of healing. We need to adhere to the principle of making people self reliant and must not deviate from it.

Often there is a problem with disobedience, pride and self will which prevents a wholesome relationship with Jesus. These are the people who confess to wanting to follow Jesus, but who do not want to be confronted by their problems and mistakes. The attitude within the Christian fraternity is that only those who are open to correction are helped. A person who is disobedient will never admit to being the problem. He isolates himself from Christians and ultimately from God. His behaviour is unpredictable and it frustrates the relationship with his helpers.

Submission of one's will

We seem to have a problem where our will is concerned. In our quest to serve the Lord we can often become over zealous, thereby limiting God. This is something that caused me a lot of spiritual strife in the first few years of my Christian life. There are many areas in our walk with Jesus where we happily participate such as praise and worship and thanksgiving in difficult circumstances, also in simpler things such as spiritual discipline. Satan however, is out to wear us down, to make us pious, which is much more than God asks of us at that moment. When Jesus directs us in a new direction, it is Satan who incites and drives us to run that path without any thought.

Regretfully this is exactly what I did when I first became a Christian. You think you are doing the right thing when in fact you are hindering God and destroy other lives. You are operating in the wrong spirit. This spirit, which occurs a lot in the evangelical environment, hardens our hearts and stumps us and God's love is nowhere to be found.

Authoritarian behaviour within the church, hardened hearts and lack of sensitivity is the result of operating in this type of spirit and this ultimately leads to conflict between God's will and our will; continual strife between ourselves and the Holy Spirit. It is then time to surrender to God's will!

Not to become a slave, absolutely not. God sanctions our will and brings it into line with His, thereby placing us in a position to operate our own free will.

Relinquishing our own will to God delivers us from this wrong spirit.

We can then relax within our Christian walk and other aspects in our growth become possible. The law of surrender is being quiet before the Lord and listening to His voice; as discussed elsewhere in this book.

I have discovered how important my will is in my spiritual battle. At one time I was so caught up in a spirit of unbelief that it seemed as though I had lost a hold on life. I felt spiritually weak and powerless against the inner turmoil called unbelief. It was pure torture, yet I knew where it was coming from. It was the confrontation with the unbelief within the church where I was ministering. Yet I did not have enough faith to conquer it. Eventually I arrived at a point in my life where I shouted out my desire to believe and have this faith. The battle was won. When I surrendered my will to Him I no longer experienced the doubts and negative power of unbelief. God taught me an important lesson which has stood me in good stead when I pray for others. I once prayed for healing for an acquaintance. After a day of fasting and prayer I reached the point where I surrendered my will and took an attitude whereby I said I wanted her to be healed. This brought about a tenacious attitude which was so important.

It is good to activate our surrendered will into the spiritual battle. Then an attitude of perseverance takes hold. In the bible, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we read about this battle:

All demons have one thing in common, namely that Christ has defeated them. There is a new ruler of the world who is Christ; but the spiritual world however, resists Christ being the ruler. As far as that's concerned, the demonic world seems a lot like ours. God is making His enemies surrender to Him, like a footstool for Jesus' feet. In the spiritual battle we are therefore confronted by the resistance, the sphere of negative influence and the powers of darkness. We will therefore have to activate our faith, that Jesus is King, with an unyielding will that the power belongs to Christ though victory in the spiritual place where we find ourselves. Or in the lives of those who come to us for pastoral help. Our unyielding will and perseverance is of great importance.

You're probably thinking, easier said than done. Don't we often shrink away? We'd rather not pay that price. That is why it is so important to submit our weak will to the Holy Spirit. If the powerful Will of God is working in our lives, we then persevere. We also see this principle in the life of Jesus. It was to God's will that Jesus submitted while hanging on the cross, to bring justice to humanity. It was God who was behind the propelling force of Love who would offer himself up for us.

To what degree do we have a free will?

In the history of the church we find two opposing opinions on this subject. One emphasizes man's free will to follow God in his own time but rather immediately and not to wait too long as time is short. The other is of the opinion that we are God's chosen

people and wait and hope that God will save us. Many appear to live in doubt as far as their relationship with God goes which causes a dilemma.

Personally I think both have some degree of truth. A person can judge and choose through his mind and self consciousness. He has a free will even when reflecting on God. He can open himself up to God, seek the truth and let Jesus into his life.

The bible confirms this when Jesus says 'I stand at the door and knock and whosoever lets me in, I will enter his life and dine with him.' But what if that home houses God's spiritual enemies which hinder one from unlatching the door? Some folk have an emotional stumbling block which prevents them from experiencing true freedom in the Lord. It is clear that man's will is more than merely choosing with the mind; it also has emotional and spiritual dimensions. Being bound by the devil can prevent us from choosing to live for Christ. The person is torn in two. He can't choose good above evil as there is something keeping him from making wholesome choices. He battles to look heaven-ward as there is a burden dragging him down. Believing becomes a struggle. This is what Jesus said 'For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.' (Luke 13:24)

We have such a great responsibility as Christians. This is why it's so important that the church and Christians in particular, need to witness to those who don't know Him.

Through a Christian's faith we can pave the way to salvation for those who live in the darkness. A parent's faith for the safe keeping of their children is so very important. Personally, at the time I decided to follow the Lord, I experienced a terrible battle torn between light and dark before true salvation took place.

Finally I would like the readers to take a good look at themselves.

Have you truly submitted your will to God; have you reached the point where you can relax in the knowledge that God is leading you, or is your Christian walk stunted?

Maybe you too are battling with an underlying current of self-will like I used to, or are weighed down by a negative spirit destroying your spiritual life. It could be that you can't let go of the past or your self-will is ruling your walk with God. Please leave it at the cross of Jesus so you can be set free. You can also use this opportunity to surrender to Him.

If you are experiencing difficult periods in your spiritual life, then perhaps today is the day to submit your will to Him and claim victory. Let your will be in harmony with your faith. Let your will work like a lever for a spiritual victory. The bible says that sometimes we will have to fight with all our might against certain things that are wrong in our lives, even if we are Christians. This is the only way to be victorious.

Our will set free

Why has satan got such an influence on people's lives?

This goes back to the first sin committed by man. Adam subjected himself to satan when he obeyed him. From that moment man's will was submitted to the enemy. This is how man came to identify with the power of darkness, whether he wanted to or not. In the Old Testament we see satan's negative imprint on people's lives. It was Jesus Christ who eventually brought about the change. This new Adam surrendered his will to God. He withstood the devil's will and was victorious. Every person who surrenders his will to Christ will experience freedom.

No matter how great the spiritual battle Satan wages against us, he is never stronger than our will which we surrendered to God!

Satan will try to invade our thoughts and emotions, but he will never rule our lives now we have Jesus. He no longer wields any power over us. God has given us total self-determination and freedom against this arch dictator. This is what the Bible means when it says that he who is made free through the Son, is truly free. (John 8:36)

Believing like a child

Matthew 11:25, 26 says "At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight." At another time he says in Matthew 18:3, 4 "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." As I read this I have to wonder why Jesus was so specific about this. Surely just going to the cross of Jesus and coming to know God is enough? So He tells us explicitly that He expects us to become as little children if we are to enter His Kingdom. When I apply these statements to my own life, it is a miracle that I came to know Him. When one has a scientific background and is an abstract thinker, one is very far from thinking simply as a child. A lot was needed therefore for my pride and animosity towards God to be broken down. As Paul said, it seems to be the intellectuals who do not come to believe in Him. Jesus is quite clear when he says the rich will find it almost impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven. Intellectual wealth is often a barrier against getting to know God. It is children who are poor and simple in their thinking who will enter the kingdom. This is why it is so important to reach children with the gospel.

When we come to the faith and experience his redemption then this miracle happens in our souls. We are reborn as children of God. God creates something new. Let's not worry how this is possible; what form this new life will have in and with Christ or what this child will look like, because God Himself decides this and develops a life with us where He becomes our Father. Firstly, it must be made clear that God has been a Father since infinite time. All the people who knew God before Christ came to save us knew Him as a Father. Deuteronomy 32:6 says: "Is not He your Father who has bought you?" God is also called the Father of Israel. Just as God has been the Father since eternity, so Jesus has been the Son. There are references in the Old Testament where it says that Jesus was with God as his Son in heaven even before the creation of earth. We read in Daniel 10 how he met someone with a human appearance who behaved with authority. In chapter 8:16 it is the voice of a man who instructs Gabriel to give an explanation of the vision. Who else could this be but Jesus? In whose image is man created? The intimate bond between Father and Son has served as an example at time of the creation. If He had not been a Father, there would be no parents and children. A parent's love is modelled on the Fatherly love of God. Now we can also understand the pain it causes Him when children are abandoned and parents get divorced. Psalm 27:10 says "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up."

God has therefore always been the Father, even before Jesus proclaimed it to the world. It is of great importance that we as Christians bear this in mind. When I realised this, my faith deepened.

Even though I experienced great things with God and experienced His great love, it took years before I realised this truth. It happened in a time when I was battling to find peace in my thinking and faith.

One day as I lay in bed exhausted trying to find solace in God, the Holy Spirit started an amazing work in me. Without consciously seeking it, I suddenly felt what it was like being cherished by God. I felt like a small baby. I may just as well have been lying safely in a crib. Childhood memories flooded my mind and I once again felt like a young child surrounded by my parents. Even my first words came rushing back, how for the first time I called my mother mummy. It was literally as Psalm 131:2 says

*“Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.”*

This consciousness, being like a young child before God, stayed with me for days. It was from here that I began calling God in a new way. “Father”. He suddenly meant more to me than ever before. Never before had I realised how great the meaning of being a Father was. I felt so insignificant, yet God surrounded me with His greatness and I felt a unity and completeness with Him. I began to realise what Jesus meant when He spoke of faith being as small as a mustard seed. So small, yet so immensely great. As this small child of God I experienced more peace in my faith and expected great and wonderful things from Him. So God taught me to believe in Him on a higher level. I realised how simple and easy it was to put my faith into practise when praying. The scriptures also became much more uncomplicated and spoke more directly to me.

If I needed to pray for something, I’d think: “I’ll just ask the Father.” It was as though I could enter into His presence more easily. As if I was growing closer to Him and He was listening.

I thought “if a son asks his father something, he always listens.” I could just not imagine God refusing my requests if they were wholesome. My prayers started being answered on all levels. Now I am a rather level-headed person so am not continually thinking about prayers being answered. As my life has progressed, these moments have recurred. When I pray for something, especially for something that needs a lot of faith, I draw close to God, just as a child would to his father. God is well pleased judging by the fruits that have been borne from my prayers.

When you can’t accept God as being your Father

I realise that this is the precise problem many people have. They do address God as their Father and want to see Him as such, but just cannot feel it. This often goes back to having lacked the love of their parents. They felt neglected and abandoned as children. To soften the pain they have surrounded themselves with high impenetrable walls. They have buried the memories and cut themselves off from the world perhaps disappointed and angry. If you were such a child, you will find difficulty in accepting God’s fatherly love. Yet you came to give your life to God and a new life has begun in your heart. Just as Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, so He is now born in the stable of your heart. Yet you can still not call God Father. But the child in you does it through the Holy Spirit. I have great faith in the power of love of this Child of God who breaks through childhood memory barriers. The new child-like faith in you will teach you to see God as your

Father. Don't be surprised if you learn to forgive your parents. The Holy Spirit does amazing things in people's hearts that have been wounded in their childhood. I once prayed with a woman who suffered under her mother's tyrannical rule. How could I show her God's love and bring her closer to Him when she had so missed her mother's love? Then the Holy Spirit showed me that God's Fatherly love is also the source of her mother's love. So He was able to fill that gap too. He wanted to be a mother to her as well. She had missed out on so many years of motherly love and now God would fill that gap. Miraculous!

The whole of creation waits on the coming of God's sons. But she also waits on the revelation of Fatherly love so that this can be revealed to all. Then all can know Him as Father. Let us kneel before Him and ask Him to reveal this amazing child-like faith. Let us as the Holy Spirit to instil it in our hearts. Let us allow our Father to become the true Father of our lives!

Learning to be quiet in God's presence

The remarkable thing about Jesus' life is that He continually withdrew Himself to have quiet time with God and to be alone with His Father. He was continually approached for help. He could not do without these quiet moments with God.

The fast and busy lifestyle of the 21st century leaves little time for quietness. It took the quietness of a monastery for me to meet with God while I was going through a stressful time in my life. Although my mind denied God, I somehow intuitively sensed His presence in the quietness of the monastery. The peace and power was so real, I did not need words to convince me of God's presence. It is so important for a Christian to learn to be quiet before the Lord and to listen to Him.

How does one learn to do this? How do you put all the busy thoughts on hold? There is no cut and dry answer. But I do however believe that God can lead us in this silence. For example, in a difficult time of spiritual strife in my life, I recalled Psalm 23 which says: "He leads me beside still waters." These words were sufficient to bring me the precious rest I so badly needed.

There was also a time when the Lord Jesus released me from a heavy burden. I experienced His peace and quietness so powerfully in my spirit that I dared not talk about it for years. With Jesus, one's turbulent heart can come to rest. He says: "Come to me and I will give you rest." His peace will be in you. He will make your heart restful and teach you to be quiet; He will lead you.

David said in Psalm 65:1: "There will be silence before thee." This makes sense as you cannot listen to God's voice without being quiet. But quietness also means drawing strength from Him. "In quietness and trust is your strength." (Isaiah 30:15) Are you heavy burdened or are there things that cannot sort themselves out, then it is worth being quiet before God. You will find it helps to lift you above your problems and helps you through the difficult times, especially when this is combined with trust. This is called 'trusting in quietness'. There is a hymn that describes this beautifully:

He who rests and is still before the Lord

And submits to God's will

Trusts and believes in Him

Who listens only to His voice

Who submits to Him

Will taste a joy that never diminishes.

Look only to Him

Faithfully follow His voice

Believe in Him

Always looking to Him

It is absolutely essential to take the time to allow Jesus to teach us to be quiet before Him and to surrender all our bad thoughts and memories, problems, worries and circumstances to Him.

Quietness and peace reigns in our hearts when we surrender to Him. By being quiet before Him we can listen to Him and look on His countenance. This is when quiet worship takes place, full of honour and love for God and a prayer of surrender is offered. Being quiet gives God a chance to lift us out of the depths of despair and take us to a place of rest before His throne, where we receive renewed strength to do the things that need to be done. Quietness can also be a testimony to others. I met a physically handicapped monk who radiated such love and joyful peace that it brought me to my knees before Jesus. A quiet heart in this busy world witnesses to people who are looking for peace. What is more beautiful than being able to share with people about the person who gives you rest and peace? Quietness can be a big blessing to others.

A silent prayer can cast out so much strife and bring healing. I have often experienced that a silent prayer for one of our children who had been ill, brought peace and helped the healing process.

There is a time to be quiet, but also a time to speak. Remaining silent when witnessing injustice or if someone needs a word of encouragement is terrible. Your spirit will show you when to speak or to actively help someone. Remaining silent is not always the right thing to do.

This is also true in the church. I enjoy the moments we share in silent worship or listening to God or prophesy and other gifts of the spirit. Yet always remaining quiet can also be wrong. There are times when praise and worship, emotions, worries and tensions need to be voiced. We have the power to give all these things to God in song, worship and prayer. There is a time for everything. Let us learn to take all the facets of our spiritual lives seriously.

Listening to God's voice

There are people who don't know that God can speak to their hearts in other ways than merely the Bible. If this wasn't so the Bible would never have been written. God continues to speak to His people. We see this for example in the first Christian church. The Bible speaks of words of wisdom, the word of knowledge and the word of prophesy, all three gifts of the Holy Spirit, where miraculous tuition is received (1Cor.12:8). Sometimes God speaks to people without them realizing that it is He who is speaking. For example, what often happens is that we wake up with a hymn in our hearts. It lifts you out of the daily worries and cares. Do you realize that this is God? Sometimes someone encourages you and says just the right things that you so badly need to hear. Do you see God's guiding hand in all this?

God sometimes speaks not through words, but through images. I remember once I woke up with an image of a cauldron. Something was being purified in this pot. The slag was

skimmed off and discarded. Once it was purified, smaller vats were filled from it. This was a beautiful vision and the message was clear. By persevering in troubled times, our faith and walk with God gets purified so that He can use us as a reservoir of faith and love for others. God also speaks to us through dreams. Joel 2:28 says “Your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. Countless Christians receive comfort in this way. These revelations are clearly different from our imagination or normal dreams. They are identified by the peace and purity from the Holy Spirit who comes to us with that which we see or hear. Finally this all has to be tested against what the Bible says. It can then never be contradicted.

God also leads us by our intuition. With our sensitive conscience, our intuition also plays an important role.

There are many situations where the peace and calm that the Holy Spirit gives us convinces us we are on the right road, especially when it is in conjunction with other instructions of how we need to live our lives. The Bible is the touchstone whether we are living our lives according to His will.

In discussions with my patients I often experience God’s Spirit guiding me, sometimes by my own intuition, at other times through a word of wisdom or knowledge.

Take for example one of my very ill patients that I had to visit at home. She was bedridden and I knew there was no hope for her and she was going to die.

On one of these visits I had the district nurse accompanying me. We had once before discussed whether it did any good to pray to God for help. She hoped for a miracle where she would wake up one day and be healed. During this visit with her in the hospital, I clearly understood the Holy Spirit ministering to me. Now was the time to talk to her about her sins. “Who am I to talk to her about sin when I had sinned so often?”

Yet I knew that there was a great sin in her life and I realized the importance of her reconciliation with God. Whether she was going to be healed or die, it was of eternal importance.

I spoke to her about this and she confessed her sin and was forgiven. She became very peaceful. Every visit after that her peace was almost tangible. Yet God spoke to me again, asking whether I was praying enough for her. Once He showed me a beautiful vision of a baby on a white cloth surrounded by light. It was confirmation that she was born again as a child of God. How wonderful to experience God’s leadership when dealing with very ill people.

If you do not heed this guidance you are making a big mistake.

God spoke to me while I was consulting with a patient who used to be addicted to heroine. With her family background I knew it was easy to broach the subject of the power of Jesus to free her. But the Spirit instructed me first to pray. But I rushed in headlong and as a consequence had a fruitless discussion with her. I regretted not obeying the Spirit for a long time after that, but it did get me praying regularly for her. I was so grateful that after a year she developed a good relationship with God. It is imperative that we listen what Jesus tells us through His Spirit.

Here are a few examples of how practical God’s guidance can be in our daily lives.

Firstly though, we need to look at which stipulations must be met before this is possible. I have really battled with this in my own life: how to discern between God’s voice and other voices, your own subconscious thoughts or impulses or whether it is the devil that is

trying to influence us. The problem of listening can be overcome provided that God teaches us to be quiet before Him. If we have an attitude of quietness in His presence, we can overcome the confusion regarding our own imagination. It is often so difficult and treacherous. You think you're listening to God's voice and in hindsight it seems you have been misled which can have terrible consequences. For example, making a decision or statement that later has to be retracted.

If you use this principle, that every inner word that comes to you is tested by asking God in prayer to repeat it, then the chances are that not a lot can go wrong. This is however very time consuming, when in fact God often speaks to us directly in situations that need immediate action; for example when He wants us to be of service to others. After battling with this problem for many years, I have discovered that it is precisely through misleading experiences when the child-like faith which should be led by the Holy Spirit, is undermined. This causes you to continue doubting and prevents you from being obedient. You wonder if it is really God's voice that you're hearing. He is there to help us, for example by reading His Word. Otherwise you will miss so many chances to be led by the Holy Spirit.

I now realize that the main condition for listening to God's voice is *faith*. Simple child-like faith. Your Father in heaven wants to talk to you and you will recognise His voice because He is your Father. In John 10:4 Jesus says: "When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice." For me, this childlike faith was the most important to listen to His voice. This is when you learn to discern between the hypocritical lies of the opponent and the firm, yet gentle voice of God. If you think God is talking to you, act on it, even if you make mistakes. This is the only way to learn to listen to His voice. I have also appreciated the joy of silencing all other voices when necessary in the name of Jesus. He gives us His promise that we will be able stand on scorpions and snakes; by silencing the mouths of lying spirits in Jesus' name, we create an atmosphere of peace and space which makes communicating with Jesus easier. Praying in the Spirit (see chapter 3) is also an instrument whereby we create an environment for ourselves to pray in a free and uninterrupted manner.

Is it always possible to listen to God's voice?

There are times when there is so much spiritual warfare that this is not possible. Personally, I follow what the written Word says. The bible couples God's leadership with the anointing of the Holy Spirit; when the Holy Spirit is saddened by our immoral conduct or where God continuously stumbles upon our disobedience, there are times when God does not want to or cannot talk to us. We need to have an attitude of wanting to listen and obey Him. It is a conscious choice we make. Do we want to have an intimate relationship with God? Forgiveness and humbling ourselves before God is what paves the way for God to talk to your heart.

This is a prayer that might help some of you.

'Father please forgive me for the things that keep You from communicating with me. Test my heart, O Lord, and free me from every hindrance that keeps me from You. Teach me to be silent and to listen.

I choose Lord, to live closer to You. Let me rebuke and silence every other misleading voice in Jesus' name.

I give You the honour and the glory and I thank You for paving the way so that I can listen to you as a child.

Amen.’

It takes courage to listen to God’s voice. For some it will be a jump in the deep end. But it is worth it. Through it He will be able to give you so much more of His love and use your life to serve needy people in your vicinity.

Thou dost water its furrows abundantly (Psalm 65:10)

Submergence into the stream of living water

Giving thanks in all circumstances

There was a time in my life where I experienced serious problems.

I was failing my exams and was wrestling with spiritual problems and this could decide whether or not I became a doctor. In my earlier book called ‘There is hope’ I have expounded on this. What does a Christian do when he feels hopeless and circumstances have placed him in an impossible and powerless situation? He holds onto God’s promises as described in the bible. One of these promises is found in Thessalonians 5:18. Paul had time and again landed in impossible, dismal circumstances. The crowds had stoned and threatened him. A man who carried Christ’s scars in his own life. And this man then says: “Be joyful in all circumstances, pray continuously and always give thanks, because that is God’s will in Christ Jesus for you”. How can someone like Paul say this? He knew it worked and had experienced great power. He had discovered the secret of being joyful and giving thanks in difficult circumstances. Well, this is what I said to the Lord: “Lord, I know I cannot do this without you, please help me. Will You, through the Holy Spirit in me, help me to give thanks in all circumstances and never stop doing so”. I knew that I could never persevere as I felt so weak at that time. But if Christ himself had a hand in it, I believed it could be done.

I began thanking God, alternating with praise and continuously praying in the Spirit. What happened? Firstly I noticed how peaceful my spiritual life became and then my thinking. I became relaxed whereas before I had experienced continual strife. And so another of God’s promises came to fruition: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”. (Philippians 4:6,7). As I gave thanks in all circumstances, God did the other and gave me peace, enabling me to study. But time was short and certainly too short for me to absorb all the work I had to learn; I continued giving thanks during the exams. A month later I got my results and had passed. I am sharing this anecdote to clarify giving thanks in all circumstances and I have had to use the secret of prayer many times.

When studying to become a doctor, you have to observe many operations. In my fourth year I attended my first operation and fainted. Many people faint at the sight of blood and I was certainly not looking forward to all the operations I had to attend in my fifth year. I then decided to approach the problem with incessant prayer and thanks. On the first day of my assisting in the operation room, I went willingly and prayed continuously and gave thanks from the depths of my heart. If anyone had known about this, they would have declared me insane. In the days that followed I became less anxious about being in the operating theatre and eventually forgot that I had had a problem. To this day I tell patients who suffer from phobias and hyperventilation that by continually giving thanks their problem might very well disappear.

A more serious situation happened where I had stick to that principle, learning to give thanks in all circumstances.

In my first year of practice, a child unfortunately died while in the care of a locum. The parents understandably felt a lot of tension, anger, regret, reproach. The negative publicity towards all hospital staff and anyone who had been involved with the young patient affected everyone. This is an experience a doctor does not want to experience too often as the emotional turmoil is devastating. This resulted in sleepless nights and restlessness and the media hounded all my colleagues and I with phone calls. As a doctor, you also experience conflict of conscience. Did you fail? If so, then how? How could this have happened? You start doubting yourself, breaking down your confidence. Then your mind goes back to the promise in Thessalonians and because you have no other choice, you reach out your hands to God and start to give thanks and praise Him, regardless of the circumstances. You do this because of who He is, because He cares for you, because He has called you and because He is able to calm chaotic situations. Then it feels as though you can literally touch the heavens and God pours His love down on you. You pray for the child's parents and for those who are full of reproach. Eventually you will experience a release making living easier again and the dark days are left behind. The memories of this nightmare however remained with me for years. In hindsight you can say that God was truly with me when I was in the depths of despair and the thanksgiving let the light shine through. When my colleague was eventually found innocent of any malpractice, it was a huge relief.

Only doctors will understand this inner battle. I meet many fellow doctors who experience such turmoil. It is inevitable that every doctor will at some time or another experience a time when things go wrong. How powerful is God to be able to carry you through the hard times and strengthen you.

It is so important for people in the medical profession to continue giving thanks regardless of the difficult circumstances and the immense fatigue they suffer. He will take care of them.

The power of praise

In a Christian life, praising God has a place, just as in Jesus' life. Jesus and His disciples sang songs of praise together. The Lord's Prayer ends in words of praise: "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever". He grew up in a Jewish environment where psalms full of praise were sung. The whole bible is essentially filled with praise and worship. The angels worshipped about the return of Jesus the Lord, also

of His coming to Jerusalem and on the day of Pentecost when they worshipped in tongues.

The worshipping of God and later of Jesus, the Lamb of God, we will see into eternity in an awesome crescendo.

When you enter the Kingdom of God you cannot avoid praise and worship. Everything in His kingdom gives the glory to Him.

What is the purpose of praise?

In a way it protects against pride and arrogance. If we give God the glory in all circumstances and honour Him in our hearts, praising Him aloud, it is difficult to fall into this trap. It also means a weapon in our spiritual battle, as when Israel walked round Jericho and Joshua called the nation to worship and praise till the walls fell down. Just as when Moses raised his hands to heaven and God's nation triumphed in battle, so the praise of a Christian is a good tool when going to battle. It chases the devil away. No dark forces can stand the praise of a Christian. I have experienced the power of praise so many times in my life. Often when I have felt weary and down but still raised my hands in worship. The Holy Spirit's power manifested itself through the praise and worship and the fountain of Life started to flow through me again. There is such joy in worshipping the Lord. A person who has not experienced this cannot understand the power and joy that this brings. This is the awesome law of worship in God's Kingdom. The love that fills God's children radiates towards the Father and turns into worship.

Through this God is glorified and His honour is spread to the rest of the world. There are times when our love for God is so overwhelming that all we can do is worship Him. Our hearts are overflowing and we have to release it by glorifying Him. There are however also dark times in our lives where we worship and trust Him. This is when you pave a way to God.

"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honours me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show him the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:23). Praise and worship is a powerful tool of faith.

Pray for a specific need and give thanks, for where there is thankfulness, there can be no doubt. "And those who don't doubt but believe receive" the Lord says. Change your attitude from one of pleading to one of believing and giving thanks. Then give God praise and He will surely hear you. If it is His will for you, your prayers will be answered. However, sometimes perseverance is needed. I once prayed for a woman with a jaw infection which she had had for many weeks. At first it seemed nothing happened. Her condition remained unchanged. Then I asked her to keep a thankful spirit and thank God for her healing. A week later she was healed.

A lot of people have problems with giving thanks and praise in their Christian walk with God. It means having no self-pity, no longer looking at the circumstances and being negative and pessimistic. This will remove the yoke of unbelief, denying oneself and praising and giving thanks as if one's prayers have already been answered.

Finally, there are many Christians who cannot see the sense in raising hands during worship. The bible however says: "Therefore I want men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands." (1Tim 2:8). The question therefore is not whether we should lift up hands in worship, but whether they are 'holy', not tainted with sin. They need to be cleansed by the confessing of sins. Once this has taken place there may be no more obstacles to

approaching God and to glorifying Him with our whole beings. Then we need no longer be ashamed in His presence. Was it not king David who danced before the ark praying in the spirit?

First experiences

When I was young my mother would take me with to small church gatherings which were so convivial I remember it to this day. I did however struggle with the reading of the bible as I did not understand it. At one meeting I remember a woman who started speaking in strange tongues. I couldn't understand what she was saying, but it really made an impression on me and only later would I understand the gift of speaking in tongues. When I was 22 years old I was anti God, church, establishment and every other anti in the book. It was at this time that I met Jesus. (See my book *There is hope*). God sought me, not me Him and a new phase of my life started. My life was filled with love that flowed through me. From that moment I started to read the bible to get to know him more intimately. It was a few months later that I went to a Christian meeting. It was huge; people came from all over the country. At the end of the service the speaker invited people to give their hearts to the Lord. Did they want Jesus in their lives or not? I wanted nothing more than to give my life to Him, after my meeting with Him months earlier. I accepted the invitation and the most amazing thing happened. While I was waiting for someone to fellowship with me and give me support, I said to the Lord, "Well Jesus, here I am and you know I have decided to follow you." A powerful force immediately flowed through me, filling me from head to toe. I stood face to face with God's Spirit who took control of my life. It was not against my will, I had surrendered to God willingly. It was not an anxiety filled experience, rather one of God taking me in His hands and His spiritual power came over my life. It was only then that I remembered reading about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I went home that day filled with anticipation. The following morning the feeling of power changed into one of joy. My heart was filled with peace. "An ocean filled with peace".

When I looked to God I was filled with gladness. The feeling lasted for weeks; whenever I focused on God a fountain of joy welled up in me. The feeling has stayed with me till today, about 16 years later.

Whenever I turn to God in prayer that warm feeling of love and joy flows out towards Him. It brings you to your knees in humble worship, with joy turning to praise. Non-believers can't understand and declare Christians as being weird. What a great secret to know the answer to this foundation of happiness though!

Jesus once said "God's Kingdom is in you". He explained it as a treasure hidden in a field; the man who found it sold all his belongings to won the field and the treasure within it.

The treasure is the glory of God's Kingdom that we can already experience in our lives right now here on earth. The field is the life of the person who follows Jesus. That is how I felt then and still do. I would give up everything, even my own life, to keep experiencing that feeling. Only then did I understand why people went through fire, in spite of persecution and mockery for the Lord; that falls by the wayside when you can experience the joy and light shining within.

Well, in the days following my experience with meeting with God, people asked me "Are you baptized in the Spirit; do you speak in tongues?" I would say "No, I don't speak in

tongues, what is that?" To my surprise it seemed they were of the opinion that that went hand in hand, as a physical manifestation of the experience.

In hindsight, I think it's a good test to have for the spiritual experience. Especially when it has been described in the bible (Mark 16:17). Then I prayed "Lord, if there is a tongue or language for me to, please give it to me". My prayer was answered. While praying this prayer, words and sounds came to me which came out calmly and controlled. I handed this situation over to God and He did as He pleased. I was not afraid and felt in control. It was a wonderful experience between God and me in prayer.

In 1 Corinthians: 14 I read what Paul says about praying in the spirit. It is apparently normal to pray in tongues and in one's own language.

What really revealed itself to me is that it opened new channels of freedom of expressing and opening myself up to God. It brought power and peace into my life.

Many people battle with this issue. They wonder whether they are lacking in something; what does this experience mean? Does everyone receive baptism in the Holy spirit in the same way?

In general, it is not a good idea to compare yourself to others. This only causes confusion. We need to look to God's Word and Jesus for the answers and use this for our measuring staff.

We can read about examples of the fulfilment of the Holy Spirit throughout the Bible. Special moments, each with its own character and lessons.

Mary, Jesus' mother was enveloped by the Holy Spirit. Of Jesus it is described how the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove when he was baptized. Then we see how Jesus blew His breath over his disciples. In this simple gesture He covers the disciples with His Spirit. Here we see the parallel with the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit blows as a great wind over them after a long time of fasting and praying.

The first occurrence happened in gentleness and after the resurrection we see the Holy Spirit come with the victory and authority of Jesus. Unbelievers were sanctified with fire and filled with power to witness and received the fruits of the spirit.

What lessons can we learn from this?

1. Each filling of the Holy Spirit is a print of Jesus' life of ours. Not we, but He is glorified.
2. Both the gentleness of the dove or the wind and the enormous power of Pentecost fit in this scenario.
3. We need to humble and submit ourselves to Him for us to have these experiences happen in our lives.
4. Maybe the more mess there is to clean up in our lives, the more powerful the experience is with God's Spirit. If you already have a close relationship with God, the baptism in the Holy Spirit could happen in a gentle and calm manner.
5. Whatever our experience, God's Spirit wants to work through us with the same gifts that the first Christians had experienced.

What do others gain by this?

How do we view the promise in Romans 8:26? Is this something that only the early Christians experienced or is it still valid today? Is it meant for everyone who follows Jesus? One day I went to visit one of my regular patients. She was in her eighties and had had physical problems and her fair share of grief. I knew that she had been a Christian for

about fifty years. She shared with me how she'd met Jesus. She told me she began speaking in tongues and did not feel comfortable with it, so stopped. This remark got me thinking about why so many Christians fear praying in the Spirit. Is it unimportant in our Christian walk? If so, why did God give it to us? In the early church it played a big role in their fellowship with God. Is it ignorance that makes people either afraid or think it unimportant? This is truly a gift from God to Christians.

I once had a patient who had been repeatedly raped by the same person. Fearing her husband would disown her, she kept it quiet and could not do anything about the situation. The only solution would be to move to a different town. After much searching she could still not find other housing. As her doctor, my patient – doctor confidentiality prevented me from going to the authorities. Eventually I gave this problem to God. I did not know what else to do or who else to turn to. When I started praying for her something happened to me emotionally; I was filled with compassion. It was Jesus speaking to me. Suddenly I felt the need to pray in the Spirit. When I started praying in tongues a stream of powerful words burst forth and it was only then that I prayed as the Lord wanted me to. It seemed that at first my prayer only reached the ceiling, but when I prayed in the Spirit it soared right into heaven and I felt I was touching God's heart. I continued praying for about ten minutes. I truly felt confident God would intervene and He did. Within weeks she had a new home, far away from the danger that lurked in her old neighbourhood. Things went well for her after that. Later we even prayed together seeking Jesus in prayer.

I learnt so much from this experience. Praying in the Spirit seems to be a commandment we must obey, so that God can work a miracle in other people's lives. It is so powerful and the impossible becomes possible.

The benefit to you

In my own life praying in the Spirit seems to be an instrument that keeps me balanced. To clarify this, let me first give you a promise from God. Proverbs 10:30 says, "The righteous will never be shaken".

Why is there so much spiritual strife which causes us so much pain? What is the importance of speaking in tongues in these situations? Does God arm us with ways to overcome this and be victorious?

I remember a day when I had just become a Christian. It seemed my head had been cemented in a spiritual vice. I tried to rectify this without success.

I then decided to spend the time praying in the Spirit. It's important to note that we can consciously start praying in the Spirit. We don't need to wait for a prompt from the Holy Spirit. If God has given you a tongue to pray in, you can use whenever and as often as you like. It is wise to practise praying in the Spirit regularly in conjunction with praying with your mind. You can pray in your own language and then carry on praying in tongues. You can thank and praise God in your own words as well as in the Spirit. If you are confused, anxious or depressed you can pray in the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit lifts you out of your problems and lifts you to heights you normally never would. It opens a path to faith and trust. This is what happened on that particular day. I first began thanking God and then continued in a spiritual language. After half an hour the Holy Spirit paved a way and opened the doors to Jesus. I experienced such joy and a wonderful feeling of

peace came over me. A new meeting with Jesus, so intense that I was overwhelmed by it for days afterwards.

Praying in the Spirit is the answer when we don't know what spiritual battles we are fighting against. There can be so many things that hinder our spiritual life, such as impatience, unbelief or any other sin in our lives. External factors such as other people's problems or spiritual attacks can also burden us. This is when the Holy Spirit knows precisely what enemy He is fighting. Through prayer the Holy Spirit reveals the truth and paves the way to free us.

Praying in the Spirit and our way of thinking

Our mind is like a battlefield. Although we may have come to spiritual renewal, our thinking remains fragile because it is part of the human soul. Our minds have indeed been freed and cleansed, but it still experiences strife. All manner of thinking patterns, reactions, negative memories and bad thoughts continue living in us. That's why the Bible says "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Our years of wrong thinking cannot be corrected over night. I remember