



CHAIN REACTION

MIKE TOWLE

School of
E[♥]angelism

CHAIN Reaction

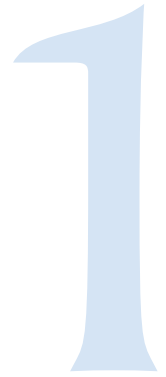
Mike & Brenda Towle

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From Michael & Brenda with Love



THE writing of this book was initiated by the response of the congregation of City Church Leeds to a questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to gather information about which topics the church most wanted teaching on. A number of subjects were listed and the congregation were asked to place them in order of priority. We were surprised and blessed to discover that the topic **'Making God Known to Others'** came way ahead of the rest. Our first thought was to produce a simple set of teaching notes and do maybe two or three teaching sessions. We quickly discovered that we had so much to share that we needed to write a book to do justice to the topic. So at least if you have to spend time reading it we can happily say, *"You asked for it!"*

We write with a longing and a hope that you will be motivated and practically helped to serve Christ in his mission to seek and save the lost. Our pastoral experience has shown us that most Christians carry a strong desire to share their faith and long to see souls saved. Our experience has also taught us that many Christians only share their faith on rare occasions. This is something of a contradiction. We put it down to some of the following:

Shyness. Previous embarrassments. Failed expectations. Use of inappropriate methods. Lack of skills. Fear of rejection. Lack of opportunity. Lack of insight and sensitivity. Personal ineffectiveness. Frustration. Disappointment. Guilt. Disinterest shown by those who don't have faith.

Most congregations respond with such joy and celebration when someone comes to Christ that they evidently do really care that souls are saved. They rejoice with heaven. So, what we share with you in the following pages is intended to encourage and equip you. It is intended to freshly motivate you. It is intended to provide you with success!

We have chosen a means of presentation that is often quite personal. The reason for this is to provide you with the opportunity to enjoy an apprenticeship.

Come out on the job with us and see how it is done. We provide extensive testimony about situations where together or individually we have shared our faith with others. In doing this we hope to demonstrate clearly that God is the architect of salvation. You will see that we study His blueprints as well as we can and try faithfully to work on the sections he has allotted to us.

It is well to say this early on. We are not asking you to copy what we do. We are each a unique creation of God, perfectly designed by him to work and serve in a unique manner. Much pain, distress, failure and frustration can be the consequence when we try to be someone else. Believe us, God doesn't want us to be a copy of someone else.

As a couple we work differently. It has been said of us: *'Michael speaks to the mind and Brenda speaks to the heart.'* We hope that this is not suggesting that Michael is heartless and Brenda is mindless. Having watched us at work, and having understood the principles and motivations that drive us, we are confident that you will develop a style easy and natural to yourselves.

You will recognise that what the apostle Paul speaks to the Colossian church interprets much of what we have to say. ***"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so you may know how to answer everyone."***

Putting off the Put-offs

2

If you have been put off sharing your faith through a previous bad experience, we understand.

My enthusiasm for dinghy sailing was cultivated through a good friend Tony. One breezy afternoon he offered to take me across Coniston Water in the Lake District. He put me in charge of the jib sail, that is, the small front sail, with these brief instructions. *"Feet under the toe straps. Sit on the edge of the hull. Lean out against the pull of the sail. Get your head well under the boom when it swings across. Sheet in and out when I say."* They were adequate. It was blowing hard and I experienced the ultimate joy ride, convinced that capsize was a whisker away most of the time. I was hooked on sailing that day. The day eventually came when, as an experienced sailor, I thought I might encourage Brenda to take up sailing by taking her for a ride the way Tony had done with me. So, one day, into the boat goes Brenda. I used the same model of teaching that Tony used with me. A stiff breeze was blowing and we reached the middle of Coniston Water well enough. Without warning a gale blew up. Getting back to shore without capsizing was a miracle. Cries to Brenda, as she struggled with the jib sail of, *"Lean out further. Spill wind. I'm about to tack, watch the boom!"*, somehow got us back to shore. Brenda never ever got back in the boat. ***She was put off for Life.***

There is a proverb, **'Zeal without knowledge is not good.'** With hindsight I am sure I could have led Brenda to become an enthusiastic sailor by using less reckless methods.

The point of this story is an important one, Evangelistic zeal without knowledge is not good. It can be a put-off for those with whom we share the Gospel, maybe for life. We can ourselves be put-off evangelism because people have responded badly. There is a phrase, *'No gain without pain.'* With regard to evangelism **there is no need for pain.** It can be, and is meant to be, a joyful experience. **This book is our sincere attempt to equip you with the insight, knowledge, wisdom and zeal that will enable you to be effective in leading people to faith in Christ.**

You may be saying, *"But I am a shy person."* What a precious gift you are! Many people would prefer to hear the Gospel message through a shy, gentle

and sensitive, none threatening person. Some may be saying, *"I am too old now."* You have a lifetime of wisdom to draw on. We have written a chapter just for you called, 'One foot in the Grave'. *"But I don't have the opportunities."* You must be a hermit. Various people have various put-offs. We fully expect that you will be freed of yours as we progress.

In ending this chapter we would like to explain that frequently put-offs arise because of unawareness of the God designed process that is unique to each individual's salvation plan. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is the key to recognising this in each person. In general terms though, we can easily comprehend that God's salvation plan generally follows a natural sequence.

This is:

- 1. Preparation of the ground.**
- 2. Sowing of the seed.**
- 3. Waiting, watering, fertilising.**
- 4. Harvesting.**

As we share our experience and faith with people, it is important to be sensitive to where they fit in this process and tailor our witness accordingly.

So how did you get Saved?



A key principle of this book is that success breeds success.

VERY early in my teaching career I grasped the power of this principle. Whenever I took over a new class, the only thing I was interested in teaching the students initially was that they could succeed. I would construct their first lessons in such a way that they could not fail to succeed. I have to admit that a few individuals who by some special skill of their own did defeat me on this. But in general, the taste of success, leading to self belief, became a powerful motivator.

Brenda and I would like to start this process by helping you to see that each of us who are now believers are someone's success story. Shall we look at their successes in leading us to salvation in Jesus Christ? Many of them, acting as one link in the chain, may never be aware of the vital part that they played. We will tell you our own salvation stories and you can compare them with your own.

Before we start, look out for these things: Teamwork and Faithfulness. In our pastoral ministry we have baptised many, many people. We have led them through their testimonies of finding Christ and putting their trust in him. In every case we could identify key faithful persons who were instrumental in the process of their salvation. **If you can offer faithfulness you are already a success.** There are few sermons that really stand out in our memories. This is fine. The majority of sermons are usually digested like good food and feed our souls. They shape and change our lives.

Occasionally we hear a sermon that imprints itself upon our souls. It continues to serve us throughout our lives. Roger Holland was a water engineer who worked as a missionary in Africa. He constructed water supply systems for remote villages. He was a member of our church, so whenever he came home on leave we would ask him to preach. On one of these occasions Roger preached on 'Failure'. He had met with extreme difficulties, mostly political, that had prevented

him completing his most recent project. He had given huge effort and suffered a deep sense of failure. In his frustration, God had spoken to him and shown him that on a personal level this tour of duty was his most successful. Why? Because it had demanded from him the largest measure of faith and faithfulness.

This was Roger's message to us:

There is no failure except a failure to be faithful to God.

Our success in evangelism can only be truly measured by our faithfulness to Christ in pursuing his passion to seek and save the lost.

We implore you at this early stage of our teaching, to grasp this truth. If we begin to measure our success by how many people we get saved, we will risk discouragement or pride. **It is the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to save people and ours to be faithful witnesses.**

This is my story: I was not brought up in a Christian home. Church had no appeal. My dad was a fine moral man but he didn't know Jesus as far as I could see. However, my Father in Heaven had a perfect plan worked out. Here is a great mystery. **Team Father, Son and Holy Spirit also need a team of faithful people to work with their plan and accomplish their purpose.** The Young Men's Christian Association was a tool in the hand of God for my salvation. My first contact with this wonderful organisation was in the City of Perth in Western Australia at the age of fifteen. I joined the Gymnastics Club and encountered a strange ritual.

When we were changed and ready for our gymnastics training, we were gathered in a circle. Then the instructor prayed a blessing on us all. At the end of the evening the instructor gathered us in a circle once more and prayed yet again. This Godly man was oblivious to the impact he had on my life. He was a success without knowing it. He had triggered something in me, the reality of God. He had sowed a seed and my journey had begun.

He was the first in a chain of Christians and events that God used for my salvation.

Having returned to England for my education, I joined the Leeds YMCA in 1957 for their sports, camping, and adventure weekends. My first encounter was with Mr. Ellis when I registered for membership. What a gracious and kind man he was. I think I got a taste of what it might be like to meet with God. In his presence one felt to be the most important person in the YMCA. Then I met the youth leaders, Tim and Stafford. Tim took us camping and adventuring and looked after the sports activities. Stafford covered the inside activities at the building. He and his wife frequently had us back to their home for supper. There came a time, when camping with Tim, that he casually asked, *"Mike, we are*

starting a religious discussion group next Friday evening, would you like to come along?" Why did I say yes? Mainly I think because it would have been mean to say no. Anyway, I did turn up. We young lads, about ten of us, were given a copy of Billy Graham's book, 'Peace with God'. Tim explained, *"We want you to read Chapter 1 before next Friday and then we will discuss it. We will follow through doing a chapter each week."* By the time I had read chapter 3 I had become a believer. The words of Billy carried such conviction that I was able to put my trust in Jesus just as he had.

At this time I had just moved, along with my step father, mother and young sister to temporary accommodation in a suburb of Leeds. By divine coincidence, the local vicar heard about this and came calling. *"I see you have just moved into the district so I thought I would call and introduce myself. My name is Mr. Franklin."* After some chit chat, he asked, *"Would you like to join me at church on Sunday?"* I decided I would, and my thirteen year old sister decided to come with me. After a couple of weeks or so he invited me round to his house for tea and a chat about my faith.

One of the ladies in the church did the same with my sister Gill. We both ended up going to confirmation classes and were eventually confirmed by the Bishop of Ripon.

I have to say that my experience of church was not the least bit inspirational but the men that God brought into my life were. Mr. Franklin was a middle aged vicar who delivered all the grace and kindness that Mr Ellis did at the YMCA.

There was an occasion many years later after becoming a Church leader, where it was appropriate, one Sunday morning, to share with my congregation the story I have just told to you. After I had shared my story I sat down and the service continued. After a few moments the Lord spoke to me and explained, *"Your testimony is incomplete."* Then he gave me a vision of all these dear men bowed in earnest prayer, pleading to God for my salvation. I was taken aback at this revelation. Then the Lord spoke again. *"Stand up and explain to the congregation how faithful in prayer these men were."* I was only too happy to honour them in this way.

[This is my story (Brenda): My parents were not Christians but were good and kind people. I think that some time in the past Mum may have attended Sunday school. My Dad may have attended an occasional church service. My mum had a Bible which she showed me when I was small. I can remember that it had pressed flowers in some of the pages. I knew it was special. Mum attended church at harvest-time, and of course my parents would attend weddings and funerals. My mum did say a bedtime prayer with me that went like this: Four angels round thy bed, where angel's wings do spread, one to pray and two to carry thy soul away. A bit frightening, but it kept me on the right track!

When I was three or four years old, my mother took me along to Sunday school for an hour during the afternoon. She never stayed but went home, to have a rest I presume. I loved to hear the stories about Jesus, especially the ones about him going around healing people. My favourite one was where he healed the young girl in bed. I remember Mr. Dodgson and all the other teachers being very nice and kind. The Bishop of Ripon confirmed me when I was ten years old.

We moved house shortly after that and one of our new neighbours recommended a Methodist Church where I attended Sunday school for a while. It was very enjoyable and we had to take scripture exams which were quite easy and which probably no one ever failed! Anyway, the Sunday school took scripture quite seriously, which was a good lesson for me. I had to listen carefully to all the Bible stories. After two years at the Methodist Church, and many miles later – it was a long walk – I started attending the local Anglican Church and stayed there for about five years. I cannot remember there being any other young people in the church. Certainly this church was not for the faint hearted! I didn't get to know anyone there, but I loved God and knew it pleased him that I went. I wanted to go anyway.

I was about nineteen years old by this time and was enjoying a very happy social life. One Sunday afternoon I was marshalling at a Motor Sport Hill Climb event. I looked round at the social set I was with and thought, *"What is the difference between my life and theirs – apart from my attending church on a Sunday morning?"* Shortly after this, a friend called Ross took me along to Baptist Church. The people were so friendly and the Minister, Tasker Lewis, a most gracious and humble person. He was the nearest man to God I had ever met. I looked at his wife and family and thought, *"This is what I want – a Christian family!"*

I had been at this church a few weeks when I changed my job. I met a girl called Doreen, who at coffee time would sit at her desk and read her Bible. I don't know why but this irritated me. How could she find her Bible so interesting that she would not join in with the rest of us? But, she was always very kind and helpful to me. One day she asked me to go to a Christian meeting with her, confessing many years later that it was the hardest thing she had ever done. Why would a person who had such a good social life and had everything going for her – in her eyes – want to attend a Christian meeting? I told her *"No thank you."* But when she told me it was to be held at one of the big hotels in Leeds and that a free buffet would be provided, I changed my mind. How could I refuse? God knows how to do it. As it happened, I didn't eat anything at all! The speaker, Dr Verna Wright, spoke about Jesus in a way I had never heard before. I thought, *"What has Jesus got to do with us going to heaven?"* He explained that God so loved the world that he sent his only son Jesus to die on the cross for all our sins, everything we had done wrong. I saw that he had suffered and died on the cross for me, that his blood was shed for me. In all my years of attending church, I had

never heard the whole wonderful story. Dr Wright asked when he had finished, *"Would anyone like to give their life to Jesus? If so, come forward."* I decided to give my life to Jesus, but didn't go forward. Instead I took one of the forms home with me that were there for us to sign when we made a commitment.

Going home on the tram, while passing the old Leeds dispensary, I could feel tears running down my cheeks as I felt God's love for me and realised what he had done for me through Jesus. *"This was it! This is what I was looking for, heaven on earth in my heart."* I signed the form when I got home and felt overwhelming warmth surround me. My life was radically transformed that day. Missionary boxes appeared on my desk at work. All other interests faded. Only God mattered. My parents thought it was just a phase but it has lasted a lifetime. Thank you God.】

These testimonies have been shared to enable you to grasp that God calls each of us to be vital agents appointed to work out his specific plans for specific people. He honours us by giving us a share in his saving grace.

There is a Welcome Waiting

4

When Jesus sent out his disciples on mission, he said this to them:

"As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town." Matthew 10:11-14.

You see, Jesus does not ask us to engage in conflict with people who really do not want to listen. We simply move on under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and **give our time and witness to those who are interested.**

Productive and fruitful ministry of God's word and witness is most effective when we live at peace with God and peace with ourselves. It is the measure of our personal faith and conviction of the truth of the gospel that will speak to people more than clever arguments. Avoid conflict and argument except where there is a definite leading of the Holy Spirit in the use of wise and persuasive words.

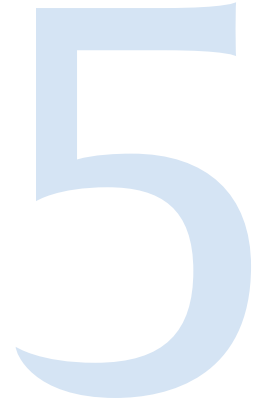
We considered calling this chapter, 'Find me a Zacchaeus'. The Bible states, ***"He wanted to see who Jesus was."*** Jesus suspended his journey and went to his house for tea. Zacchaeus was soundly saved. This should be the way in which our ministry to the lost is conducted. All those Zacchaeus types around us need a contact point and we are it.

Early in our ministry we led church for some time under the assumption that it was the normal practice of believers to share Christ wherever they were.

Two of the members of our congregation worked together in a local care institution. One day we bumped into a member of staff employed by the same institution. As part of our witness to her we were able to say happily, *"If you want to discuss things further we have two of our congregation working with you. Talk to them and they will be very helpful."* "Who do you mean?" they asked. "You know, so and so and so and so and so," we replied. With a blank look and a genuine air of disbelief she questioned, *"Are they Christians?"* We were deeply saddened. Jesus said, *"Whoever says before people that they belong to me, I will say to the Father in heaven that they are mine."*

As the basic minimum of our witness, people must be aware that we are Christians, or who can they go to if they have an interest in finding out more regarding the gospel.

Street Wise



Colossians 4:5. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders.

We must be wise to our present day and culture. Many evangelistic patterns emerged during times of revival and at a time when the population was culturally aware of the beliefs of Christianity.

Educational establishments generally embraced Christianity for their moral and spiritual guidance. If someone boldly placed a hand on one's shoulder and asked, *"Are you saved brother?"* the question would be understood even if it was considered offensive. Be wise to what we said earlier.

Salvation is a process: Preparing the ground, planting the seeds, cultivating, and finally harvesting.

A double glazing salesman called at our home one day. He was not the first, and as usual I politely turned down the offer due to lack of funds. Before he went on his way I asked him a question. *"Don't you get discouraged trailing round house after house and being turned away so many times?"* *"Oh no"*, he answered quite perkily, *"We work on a simple and reliable statistic. On average we make 200 house calls for one sale. We just keep calling and then 'bingo' up comes a winner."*

Proverbs 1:20. Wisdom calls aloud from the street.

Dear friends, let us learn a very important lesson from our determined salesmen. Have we done 200 calls yet? Just politely knocking on the doors of the lives of those who have not yet found Jesus? There came a day after I had rejected any number of attempts to sell me double glazed windows, when I saw the light and decided they were a very good idea. The company that approached me cashed in on the persuasive talks of many previous companies. Keep on with your witness. You may cash in on someone else's work.

Prayer Opens Doors



Acts 12: So Peter was kept in prison but the church was earnestly praying for him They came to the iron gate leading to the city and it opened for them by itself.

Colossians 4: And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message so that I may speak about Christ clearly.

There was a vital season some years ago when many churches engaged in prayer walking. The church we were leading at the time was faithful in this. We would frequently walk around our districts interceding for homes, institutions commercial premises, and particularly schools. We had a strong desire to see the ministries of Leeds Faith In Schools established in the two large secondary schools in our area. They had been approached on more than one occasion and had not shown an interest.

One evening we took our house-group out to pray all round the perimeter of one of these schools, asking God according to his word to open the doors of this school to the message of Christ. As we walked back to the home we normally met in, to thaw out and have a coffee, an overwhelming certainty fell on my spirit that our prayers had been answered. I was able to declare this. Two weeks later the school had agreed to accept one of the workers from LFIS.

The following week I was meditating on what topic we should consider for our next house-group discussion meeting. Unexpectedly I received exact and detailed instructions from the Lord. *"Tell the group that it is my intention to open the door of your other school. You are to divide into four groups and go and stand north, south, east and west facing the school from all four directions. At 8pm. pray all at the same time for fifteen minutes. The school will be opened."* I admit that I was nervous about taking this message to the group. My reputation was on the line. We did what God had spoken and within two weeks a LFIS worker was invited to minister there on a permanent basis. For both of these schools we had been waiting for eighteen months to gain entry. It was a real breakthrough in response to prayers for open doors.

[Brenda: A number of years ago as Michael and I were praying, into my mind God gave me a picture of a man behind prison bars in some foreign country. He was very unkempt. He was dirty and starved, his teeth were all rotten. He had long straggly hair. I described to Michael what I was seeing. I knew that God was calling us to pray for him. Not knowing what to pray, we prayed in tongues for some time. The following evening my neighbour's newspaper was delivered to us by mistake. I decided to have a sneaky read before returning it. On the second page was a photograph of exactly the man I had described to Michael, the one we had been praying for the night before. I couldn't believe it! His name was Poresh. He was a Christian and had been in prison for seven years because of his faith. He hadn't seen his wife and two children for all that time. Because of malnutrition most of his teeth had fallen out. He was in his late twenties. Apparently a Bradford M.P. had taken up his case and was trying to arrange for him to be released. *"Thank you Father God that you heard Poresh's cry for help and put it on our hearts to pray for him."* In just a short time his release from jail was reported in the newspaper. Praise God for his mercy. He literally opens prison doors if his people pray.

To hear God and fulfil his plans we need to meet with God in prayer. It was in the place of prayer that God revealed the plight of Poresh and it was through prayer that he was released. God's word says that all the plans he has for us are plans for our good, not for harm. Take time to listen for the plans of God. God wants to see all those who we are concerned for, released from their prisons of deception, into the truth that receiving Jesus will provide them with a new life.]

You have an Allotment – Enjoy it



Genesis 2:15. The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

The responsibility that God gave to Adam was for his enjoyment, and to share his wonders of creation with. If God had put Adam in the garden just to relax and watch he would soon have become bored.

You will have probably heard the story of the old gardener and the vicar. As the vicar strolled by he paused to admire the old man's garden. It was a true work of art. He commented, *"My, my John, isn't God's creation wonderful?"* *"Well vicar, that may be so, but you should have seen this place when God had it all to himself."* Speaking from a spiritual perspective it seems that it is a priority with God to partnership with humanity in all his plans and purposes. He has no desire to have things all to himself it seems. His essential plans and purposes seem to be to populate heaven with his very own children born again of the Spirit to eternal life. He has given us a sacred responsibility to partnership with him in this. Jesus was crystal clear when he explained our responsibilities and how to fulfil them. ***"You are to be my witnesses to all peoples and make disciples of them, baptise them, and teach them everything I have taught you."*** It is safe to say that he hasn't changed his mind about any of that.

People who keep allotments gain a great deal of fulfilment and pleasure from this purposeful and creative activity. So can we when we are tending our spiritual allotments. When the tribes of Israel occupied the Promised Land, God allotted to each tribe a specific area with specific boundaries, giving them responsibility for it. We would like you to view all your areas of influence, all those spaces that you occupy on your journey of life as your allotment from God. As you choose to tend your allotment, seeing it as where God has placed you to

advance his kingdom, make up your mind to enjoy the work! This is important, because if you do not enjoy it you will find yourself neglecting the land and it will become overgrown with weeds.

Allotments are divided up into different sections for different crops and cultivated accordingly. It helps to use this as a metaphor. In general, life's activities mostly fall into these categories:

Close family members	Other relatives	Close friends
Casual friends	Neighbourhoods	Commuting
Workplaces	Education centres	Transport centres
Hairdressers	Shops and retail outlets	Trades people
Cleaners	Leisure centres	Holidays
Pubs	Restaurants	Airports
Cafes	Hotels	Walks
Streets	Hospitals	Clinics
Charities	Church	Libraries
Sports and hobbies	Community events	Etc, Etc, Etc.

There was a season when it was not unusual for frustrated Church leaders or visiting speakers to harangue congregations with, *"It's time to get out of your comfort zone and get out there and tell people about Jesus!!"* I have two main comments to make on this. Firstly, we are already 'out there'.

Considering the list above it is obvious that unless we are housebound we spend huge amounts of time 'out there'. We connect with people constantly just living our normal routines.

Secondly, except in unusual circumstances, I don't think that witnessing and feeling uncomfortable work well together. If we are uncomfortable it is likely that we will make those we are witnessing to feel uncomfortable. If the Holy Spirit is bringing conviction, that is another matter

Neighbourhood Watch



Acts 17:26, 27. 'From one man God made every people group that they should inhabit the whole earth. He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that people would seek him and perhaps reach out and find him.'

We wonder if you are ready to say the prayer we have set out below. If not, that's OK. It is likely that by the end of this book you will want to do so. Come back to it then.

A Prayer:

"Lord, I do not live where I live by chance.

Lord, with your help, in as far as I am able, I accept responsibility for making Christ known to the people in my neighbourhood.

Lord, I will respond to every opportunity, and seek every opportunity to fulfil this responsibility.

Lord, I ask myself this: 'If I do not, who will?'

Lord, I will faithfully pray for doors to open to the message of Christ.

Lord I now look to you to encourage me by showing your hand at work, giving me an early opportunity to speak of you.

Lead me, guide me and help me Holy Spirit."

We are very ordinary people. This is not false modesty. But God has done many remarkable things through us. He will do remarkable things through any of us.

If we devote ourselves to saving souls we will see souls saved.

It can't be otherwise. It is by following the leading of the Holy Spirit that we will see this happen. Over the years we have led many of our neighbours to Christ on his account. We live in a semi-detached suburban house. Our street is a short

one which spans two longer streets. Our direct points of contact are essentially the houses on our short street and houses just round the four corners. It is truthful to say that we have witnessed to all the occupants of these houses. The title of this chapter is inspired by the fact that we felt the need to extend our territory. As a practical step we agreed to join our local 'Neighbourhood Watch' organisation. This was not for security reasons but to extend our contacts.

This is a good time now for a few stories. It was a warm summer's day. Rigged out in old denims and a paint splattered tee shirt, I was happily painting the white stucco walls at the front of our house. While high up the ladder, God spoke to me in a startling way. This is what he said. *"Michael, you know that your next door neighbour Janet has an ear problem. I want you to heal it."* If I had healed anyone before or even attended a church where healings took place, I could have accepted God's message more easily. This was all new to me!

What should I do? Gideon, I thought! He put fleeces out to test God's message to him. What can I use as a fleece? Inspiration came. The previous day, Brenda had complained about a minor health problem which was causing her discomfort. We had a good prayer life together so amongst other matters we had brought it up before God. It couldn't be classed as a prayer for healing. I had my fleece. I climbed down the ladder and went into the house. *"Brenda I called, that problem you were having trouble with, how is it today?"* She paused for a moment and said confidently, *"It's fine, I am not having any problems now."* Taking a deep breath, I went back to my painting. I reached the top of the ladder and fresh inspiration came.

I thought, *"Gideon put out more than one fleece so why shouldn't I? It was time to talk to God."* *"Father"*, I said, *"If I am going to do this, please send Janet round to our house. I would be much too embarrassed to go to hers."* I reckoned that I was off the hook for two or three weeks. Though we were very good friends with Janet and her husband, she would rarely visit spontaneously. Five minutes later, I heard the click, click of high heels. Janet came down the drive and as she passed my ladder, called up, *"Just calling round to see Brenda."* God had me trapped! I spent ten minutes building up courage before going back down the ladder and into the dining room where Brenda and Janet were chatting.

"How are you going on with that ear problem Janet?" I asked in a casual manner. *"It's quite serious,"* she replied, *"I'm going into hospital on Wednesday for an operation."* There was no way out. *"Would you like me to pray for it to be healed?"* I asked hesitantly. Janet was not a believer at this time, but to my surprise she replied with great enthusiasm, *"Yes please, that would be great."* While I was wondering how I should go about this, I looked round for Brenda thinking help would be at hand. She had 'done a runner' as the saying goes. I was on my own. *"How would Jesus have done this?"* I thought. I suppose he would have touched

her ear. *"Is it OK if I touch your ear?"* I asked. *"Fine."* she said. I reached over, lightly touched her ear and simply prayed, *"Lord Jesus, please heal Janet's ear."* She duly attended the hospital for the needed operation. The surgeon, on inspecting her ear could find nothing wrong with it. The operation was cancelled and she was discharged. Following this, Janet joined our Bible study group, met with Jesus, became a Christian and was baptised.

Clifford was our other next door neighbour. Our drives ran parallel, so he and I frequently had a chat over the low fence. He was a fine retired gentleman of the old school. He wore plus fours for golf, and a very smart blazer and tie as his usual apparel. He fitted the typical image of a Major in an Agatha Christy play. He was always very correct in his manner and a very private man. Soon after Janet's healing, he complained to me one day that he was suffering from a very painful bout of shingles. I said to him, *"You know that we are Christians Clifford. We believe that God is always ready to answer prayer. Would you like me to pray for you to be healed?"* It was immediately clear that I had invaded his personal space. I had got this badly wrong. Mustering his politeness and good form he replied stiffly, *"I really do not think so Michael."* I tried to recover the situation as best I could by replying, *"That's fine Clifford, I perfectly understand. Brenda and I will remember you in our prayer times."* Month by month, in our friendly chats over the fence, I would keep drip feeding the things of God in the context of things that were happening at church. Clifford showed polite interest but little response. One day as we were chatting over the fence, a team of Jehovah's witnesses strolled down my drive and presented their version of the Gospel. When they had finished I talked to them about the true Christ, the Son of God who died on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins and for our salvation. In reality I preached the Gospel to them in the power of the Holy Spirit. Clifford became transfixed, taken aback by the authority with which I spoke. He came to faith listening to me preaching to someone else and feeling safe in his own private space on the other side of the fence. The following Sunday I was delighted to see him drive off in his car to a church that suited his temperament. He did this faithfully every Sunday following.

As Paul wrote to the Church in Rome, *'Faith comes by hearing'*.

Directly opposite our house, just across the road is a bungalow. Claire, a middle aged widow lived there at the time of these two stories. She had no family to care for her so we stood in the gap frequently. A year or so after Janet and Clifford became Christians, while we were establishing a new church in the district, Claire became a Christian. This is how it happened.

Billy Graham was about to hold a stadium mission in London so we had arranged a video link to our local town hall. To advertise this, I had produced fifty placards fastened to stakes, ready to be erected in front gardens and grass verges around the district. I had planned to put the first outside our house. Claire was watering her front garden with a hose as I hammered the placard and stake

into our grass verge. Just as I finished, Claire's hose connection came loose and water sprayed everywhere. I rushed over in my Billy Graham tee shirt and sorted out the problem. Claire looked at me, then at the placard, then back at me and hesitantly said, *"Michael, yesterday I was feeling so desperate about my life that I found myself praying to God about things. Do you know what I ended up praying? Please God give me a sign. Here you are the very next morning hammering a sign into the verge before my very eyes."* She came with us to see and hear Billy Graham's presentation of the Gospel. She went forward at the end to commit her life to Christ. She joined our new church along with others and was baptised soon after.

[Brenda: I was drawing the bedroom curtains at about 10.30pm when an ambulance crawled past our house very slowly. I ran downstairs to see if I could help with directions. The ambulance had stopped. The medics got out and went to our neighbour Robin and Janice's house. I came back home and after two minutes saw the ambulance drive past with Robin and Janice following in their car. Their two year old daughter was being taken to hospital. I wrote a note saying that I had seen the ambulance passing and if there was anything I could do, to let me know. I put it through their letter box for when they came home. Janice came round the following afternoon carrying her little girl to say a big thank you for the note. She explained that when she and her husband had come back from the hospital during the night feeling very down, just seeing the note on the doormat had meant so much to them. They didn't feel so alone. This act of kindness built a platform for further witness. Janice was diagnosed with a slipped disc some time later and told that she would be laid up for six weeks. We called round and offered to pray. Her back was healed and she was back at work in two days. Following this they did visit our church a time or two but we were unable to see them through to full salvation before they moved house. We were happy to have prepared the ground and sowed the seed. We trusted that someone else in God's chain would continue the good work and see the harvest.

My next story demonstrates this. One day I saw one of our neighbours walking past our house. He looked terrible and was walking in a wholly dejected manner. He had very good reasons. I had already heard through a neighbour that his wife had recently left him on his daughter's wedding day. He had lost his job and company car. He had cancer of the nose. He was drinking very heavily and he had been forced to put his house up for sale. I had only spoken to him once previously when he came to borrow something.

He was a difficult man. However when I had seen him passing my heart had gone out to him. I prayed, *"Lord if there is any way that I can help him, please send him round to our house."*

The very next day, John came knocking on my door. He had come to invite me to his daughters 'cleaning product party' which was being held at his house.

I refused graciously but said to him, *"You are here because the Lord has sent you."* (Who is this crazy woman?) As I looked him full in the face, his eyes filled up with tears. He told me that the previous night he had seriously contemplated ending his life. *"As I lay on my bed, I shouted in complete desperation, If there is anyone out there please help me."* What a wonderful God we serve. I invited him to go to church with us which he did.

Michael preached, and afterwards John said he would walk home. (probably so he could call at the pub) Two weeks later his house sold and we didn't see him again. Three years later he knocked on our door to thank us and explained how his life had been completely changed. He had stopped drinking. His nose cancer was healed. He had found a new job and bought a new car. He was happily re-married. But best of all he had become a Christian and was settled in a good church.

Another one of our neighbours, Betty, a divorced businesswoman, had just moved into our street. I asked her if she would like to come round to my house for coffee in order to meet some of the neighbours. She replied quite firmly, *"No"*. That was that! Over the years the hedge round her house grew and grew. No one seemed to know much about her at all. One day I saw her son pushing her in a wheelchair and another neighbour heard that she had had an operation. A few days later the Lord said to me, *"Go along and see her."* I was hesitant after the first rebuff but have learned to trust God and be obedient to his instructions. I knocked on her door and her son opened it and gave me a good welcome. *"My mother is upstairs in bed, she has cancer, do go up and see her."* She was pleased to see me and shared immediately how worried she was about her son, very concerned about how he would manage when she died. He was worried about who was going to look after his mother and cook her meals when he went back to university the following week. So, the long and short of it was that I became head chef for four months till she died. Our own meals at home improved remarkably during this time as I simply made an extra portion when I cooked for my own family.

She wore a cord round her neck with an emergency button. If the pain got too much for her she could press this button and a nurse would be sent to give her a morphine injection. One day, not long after my first visit, she was in great pain and I suggested that I should pray with her. She agreed, and as I prayed the pain left. She stopped using the emergency button from then on. She phoned me instead. It was quite amazing. Each time I prayed the pain left. One day her daughter, who lived in Bradford, came to visit at a time while I was there. She was a Christian as it turned out. She explained that she and some of the people at her church had been praying for some time that someone would speak to her mum about God before she died.

Their prayers had been well and truly answered. In the days before she died, Michael felt inspired to write her a letter, explaining the gospel in the clearest terms. He included a prayer she could use to accept Christ and receive her salvation.

Michael and I could tell lots of unfinished stories to illustrate how we serve people's need to journey through a process towards their salvation.]

Chapter 11 of this book, 'Brief Encounter or Long patient Road' touches on this quite well.

The salvation of each soul is a unique and individual process designed by God and we must learn to partner well with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We cannot offer any fixed models or methods.

This is why we have chosen to present as many testimonies as we can find space for. It will encourage you to take each opportunity on its own merits, find patience to trust the plan of God and remember that we are all links in a chain. There is no substitute for sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul says, *"I become all things to all men in order that they may be saved!"* If we learn to focus on becoming a blessing to all people in the manner that most blesses them, we will find them ready to listen to the message of truth and life that we offer. We can expect God to act in power through the Holy Spirit. The ministry of healing frequently attends the message as we bring it. Word and power come together. We are the message before we ever speak it. Michael says he can hardly remember anything the men of God who brought him to Christ spoke about the gospel. In fact it seemed that they left that to Billy Graham through his book 'Peace with God'. What he does remember is their kindness and all the many blessings they brought into his life. Here is some helpful advice. If you wish to share your testimony with someone, begin by taking a genuine interest in them and their story of life. Get them to tell their stories and choose to take a sincere interest and enjoyment in them as you listen. Be genuinely interested in what they find interesting, what they believe and why. Most people are very happy for us to take an interest. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. There will come the right time when they will become curious about your life and interests. Presenting Christ in this context is easy. There is no trespass involved. Be content to share a little at a time over a number of conversations.

Hi Ho, Hi Ho, & Off To Work I Go!



This morning, just before sitting down to write this chapter, we received a letter from the ‘Evangelical Alliance’ of which we are members. Let us quote: *‘A Time to Act. Secularism is biting deeper and deeper into our society and eroding our Christian heritage. This is not just a battle of ideas. The consequences are seen in the changing values shaping our laws and public policies.’*

Evangelical Alliance is doing an excellent work challenging legislation that does not reflect traditional Christian values, sometimes with significant success. It works hard to influence Government. However, this is what the General Director Joel Edwards says further on in his letter. *‘Nothing stops secularism more effectively than leading people to faith in Jesus. We need to take the Bible-based Christian truths and values we preach in church on Sundays and display them every day to our society with a persuasive power that cannot be ignored by the watching world’.*

The majority of us spend most of our days in the work place. It is a place where continued relationships and friendships can be generated. Through them we can make Christ accessible. We would like you to establish a mindset regarding the workplace that says this. **For Christian believers, the workplace is not primarily a place to earn a living. It is a mission field. It is a place where we can advance the Kingdom of Heaven.**

Allowing for the general image most un-churched people have of the church, not many are going to seek faith by coming to our services.

We must go to them as the community of believers and demonstrate Christ-likeness. We can be honest, truthful, just, trustworthy, tolerant, kind, compassionate, forgiving, caring, gracious, concerned, friendly, helpful, respectful,

clean in our language, peacemakers not gossipers, humble not proud. **This is how we will change the image of the church.** People are desperate to be loved and valued, to matter, to be treated with fairness, to be shown an alternative to the corruption seen so commonly in society. The workplace offers somewhere to be truly distinctive and to glorify Christ.

Before entering full time ministry I taught in Comprehensive Schools for twenty three years. My last School had 1,400 students and 85 teaching staff. Only three of us were active Christians and were fondly referred to as the 'God Squad'. It wasn't use in a derogatory manner. We were all liked and respected. I led Bible studies for the staff at lunch times and also for the pupils. Quite a few came to faith. I was particularly blessed by meeting two of my sixth form students after they had left school to find that they had become 'young elders' in thriving churches. I believe that when we make ourselves available to God for witness, he will establish a platform for fulfilling the task. I had endless opportunities to share Christ widely without being seen as an oddity. Quite the contrary, I earned much respect and friendship because of my transparency. Indeed, when I left to go into ministry and an end of term a collection was taken to purchase presents for those staff leaving for other jobs, the headmaster came to see me. *"Mr. Towle, we have a problem. Your collection is the largest in the history of the school by far, and it is going to be embarrassing to give such a large present to you against the much smaller presents for others leaving. How would you feel if we share you collection money with the others?"* I was happy to agree, and happy that the headmaster felt confident to ask me without fear of offence. By no means do I share this with you to boast. I share it because so many Christians think they will become unpopular if they are transparent about their faith. This is most unlikely if you do this with humility and wisdom. I dreadfully missed the school mission field when I started working in the church full time.

When I reached the age of sixty, Brenda and I passed on the leadership of the church to a young couple with a view to managing a generational change. This involved me 'going back to work'. That was OK. I was very happy to do so with all the opportunities it offered for mission. I became a self employed landscape gardener and I loved it. There were lots of opportunities to help other churches too. I have a fund of exciting stories to tell from this period but I think I have said enough now about my workplaces. Brenda will continue from here.

[Brenda: One day, many years ago now, I was passing our local post office when I saw a card in the window. ***'Child minder wanted, one hour after school, five days a week, good pay'***. I had no thoughts of getting a job as we were busy enough starting a new church. Anyway, I found myself taking down the phone number. The 'good pay' might have had something to do with it. When I went for interview, Pat told me what my duties would be and asked me to come back at

a later date when she would show me where things were. I then proceeded to tell her about God and what he had done in my life. I was there nearly an hour while Michael waited patiently outside in the car. I got into the car and said, *"She might phone and say she has changed her mind. I wouldn't blame her, but at least she has heard the Gospel."* She did ring back and arranged for me to see her in two weeks time. When I arrived at the house she told me that since my visit there had been no swearing in the home and that she had accepted what I had said. I invited her to our church the following Sunday and she has attended ever since. Over the following years God has used Pat greatly. She started a Christian Union at her large comprehensive school. She invited Christian believers to speak at the assemblies. She started prayer meetings for the staff and pupils. In simple terms, Pat took the church into the workplace. You see how one conversation can lead to a chain reaction. If I had remained silent about my faith, that strategic school would not have benefited from Pat's influence.

At the time we were handing over our church, I decided to look for a part time office job, the income from which would help towards our future pension. I chanced to see a Christian lady who I knew who had an executive position at a local company. I asked her if there were any vacancies. The following week she rang to say that there was a vacancy in the showroom. I went for an interview and was appointed. At this time, we were, through our church, collecting goods to send to an orphanage in war torn Bosnia.

The company allowed me to use their car park as a collection point where the goods could be taken and loaded onto the truck that was about to drive through war zone. Later I was able to take photo's to show the children at the orphanage receiving the gifts with joy. Pity I didn't have pictures of the bullet holes that the truck had collected on the journey!

The sales director was very impressed with the work I was involved with, and when I mentioned that we also collected clothes for homeless people in Leeds, he called round with an armful of Gucci and other well known designer suits and clothes. One of our front line helpers phoned to ask where the clothes were coming from because the homeless people were now better dressed than the helpers! All very amusing. So we can see that witnessing Christ to the workplace through actions as well as words is very powerful.

Let me tell you about Liz who was instrumental in arranging my interview at this company. I discovered that she had fallen away from church fellowship twenty years previously. During the fifteen months I worked at this company, I took advantage of any opportunity to witness to her and pray for her, and encourage her. I had the privilege and joy of seeing her return to full faith and of baptising her. It was so rewarding to see her back in church and fully committed.

While I worked at this company, I would occasionally go over to the offices to talk briefly to a lady called Sue. A year after I left, I received a phone call from

Liz who I had baptised. She explained that Sue was in hospital suffering from a brain tumour and was now blind in one eye. Liz explained that Sue knew I was a believing Christian because of my witnessing, and had asked if I would visit her in hospital to explain the meaning of life. I asked Michael to come with me and we both shared our faith with her.

When we prayed for her to be healed the presence of God came in power. The story has a happy ending. She fully recovered and went back to work.】

At the School Gate

10

[Brenda: For a number of years I was working as a Nanny at different times of the week for different mothers. One of my duties was to collect children from the local school. Listen to me mums, dads, grandmas, granddads and childminders, the school gate is a wonderful place to make contacts. As appropriate, and with sensitivity and wisdom, I take plants and cuttings for those who like gardening, magazines that suit their interests. I take cards if their parents are ill. I offer to pray for them if they are distressed. I serve their particular needs as these become apparent through conversation and growing relationship. I gave out UCB 'Word for Today' devotionals to a number of mothers. One mother now has her own copy delivered to her home. I gave one copy to a mother who gave me no feedback for three months until I gave her the next three month copy. *"Ooooooh thank you Brenda. I read it every night before I go to bed. It gives me a tremendous peace and go to sleep immediately."*

A lady called Amy had moved with her little boy into the town where I work. This followed a traumatic time in her relationship with the boy's father. I chatted to her about God's love for her without feeling any restraint, and told her that he was on her case. She said that her next door neighbour was a Christian and had spoken the same things to her the week before. She had been particularly touched that her neighbour had left flowers on her doorstep the day she moved in. It had brought tears to her eyes. Somebody cared. Then she told me that some years earlier she had attended an Alpha course but it had left her with many unanswered questions. Michael sorted some books out for her. I only had the opportunity to speak to her three or four times on the phone and in the playground twice. However a friend told me that she had seen Amy at her church. She was crying and people gathered round her, prayed for her and comforted her.

Can I tell you about a grandmother who I met at the school gate. After ten months of laughing and chatting about various things, including, our times in the

50s and 60s, she invited me to lunch. Up to this time it had not been appropriate to share my faith. All she knew was that I attended church. As we were having lunch she told me about the death of her husband three years earlier, which led me on to tell her how Angela, our daughter, when three years old had been taken suddenly ill and died in Michael's arms in hospital. She made a sudden loud cry that frightened me for a moment. She came round to my side of the table, put her arms round me and said, *"How terrible it must have been for you?"* I agreed with her but I explained that I knew the love of God and that he always remains good whatever we suffer. I was able then to go on and give her the whole of my testimony as written earlier in the book. The following week I wondered how she would react to me. She had not been put off and we have arranged to meet at my house for our next lunch together.

A young mum I met at the school invited me to her house for coffee. I had been talking to her in the playground when she told me she was interested in all aspects of health and beauty. I had expressed a brief interest in getting more exercise so she invited me along to her house to discuss the benefits of healthy eating and exercise. She showed me her exercise machine. It looked like an instrument of torture and I soon went off that idea. She invited me to go 'power walking' one day. Help! I wonder if people feel like this when we invite them to Church? She accepted my invitation to lunch enthusiastically, and will be coming next week. There is a right time, a right opportunity to begin to speak about God and I have learned to be patient and wait. Michael and I become quite disturbed when people say to us, *"Oh, but you two are just specially gifted in bringing people to faith."*

**Nowhere in the Bible is witnessing described as a gift.
It is a command of Jesus.**

The reason we see so many come to him is because we choose to obey his command. Our success is based on obedience to Christ which we exercise in love, kindness, sensitivity, and patience. We choose to fully respect and honour people at all times. We don't judge. We offer friendship. We are faithful in prayer. We have learned much wisdom through practice and are passing it on to you. Also, we listen to the Holy Spirit at all times and are guided by him. You have to agree that none of this is out of your reach? As we explained earlier, we have all been given an allotment by God. If we cultivate it we will see fruit!]

Brief Encounter or Long Patient Road



A brief Bible study is appropriate here. It would be helpful for you to read Chapters 23: 23 to 26: 32, from the book of Acts. We see Paul testifying under trial first to Felix, the Governor of Caesarea. Then, two years later, to Festus who was successor to Felix. When King Agrippa visited Festus and heard Paul's testimony, this is what he said. *"Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to become a Christian?"* Paul's reply was, *"Short time or long – I pray to God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today may become Christians as I am."* We continue to read that Felix sent for Paul and listened to what he had to say about faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul talked to Felix on the subject of righteousness and judgement, Felix became afraid and said, *"That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."* Well he did find it convenient. We read on, *"so he sent for Paul frequently and talked with him."*

It appears that this went on for a period of two years. There is no mention in the scriptures regarding the outcome of Paul's ministry to these three men. The story moves on and leaves them behind. Did any or all of them come to a committed faith in Jesus? The thing is that Paul was faithful in his witness and they were presented with a choice. We can do no more. Felix did not cry out, "That's enough!" He cried out "That's enough for now!" We do need to be sensitive. Recognise when people have had enough generally or in any particular conversation. The journey to salvation of any particular individual can be long or short.

As mentioned earlier, prior to taking up full time ministry I was on the staff of a comprehensive school. On and off I shared my faith with Henry, a senior colleague, the whole of my time there. Twenty years in fact. We became great friends. We had similar values, agreed on traditional standards, and worked

hard together to influence the whole school in this. I met with him frequently and talked with him about Christ as Paul had done with Felix. I used to say of Henry, *"He is the most Christ-like man I know who isn't a confessed believer. If he ever becomes a believing Christian I don't know I would be able to tell by his behaviour."* Of the eighty five staff at this school, he was the one I most longed to see find Jesus. When I left the school, I was truly disappointed that he hadn't taken the step of faith that I longed for. However, I heard a few months later that he had done so, and it wasn't long before he became an active deacon in a church in the Yorkshire Dales town where he lived.

By contrast, here is a story at the other extreme. I was at a gathering of Church leaders in Leeds when in the coffee interval a lady came over to me and said, *"You don't know me Michael, but I know you. I was at a wedding that you conducted for some friends of mine. You preached a powerful sermon that changed my life and I became a Christian. You see that man over there, he is my husband. I married a church pastor! At the present time we are establishing a new church together."*

In Acts 20:24 Paul says: "However, I consider my life nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

We're all Going on a Summer Holiday!

12

DEAR friends, if we truly set our hearts to see people brought into God's kingdom, and take even a few first tentative steps towards adopting a life of witness, he will provide us with all we require to be effective. The Holy Spirit empowering will come upon us and he will equip us.

Our main summer holiday used to be taken in Devon or Cornwall. One year we were able to go full-board in a small hotel instead of our usual self-catering. By the end of the week we had shared our faith with so many of the guests, and they showed such interest, that we could easily have started a Bible study group if we had booked for two weeks instead of one.

Witnessing on holiday is particularly easy, but follow up isn't normally possible. We have to be content by faith that the seed of the word that we sow into good soil will eventually take root and grow. We can trust God to provide other believers to continue the work. We will leave behind many unfinished stories.

Paul wrote to the Philippians: 'I always pray with joy because of our partnership in the gospel, being confident of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion.'

Personally, I derive strong motivation to witness simply because I know that it blesses my Heavenly Father along with His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We have many exciting and remarkable stories to tell about our holiday witness but we need to go on to the next chapter.

Family Matters

13

THIS chapter scares us. We are about to enter a minefield. Evangelistic endeavour within the intimacies and highly charged emotional relationships within family carry the potential for disaster, particularly if one member finds Jesus and enthusiastically sets to work to convert the others. Even if this is pursued with the greatest wisdom and sensitivity, trouble is likely to emerge. Why is that?

Let us begin with the marriage relationship. Two people choose to love and marry because of who they each are, but if one receives Christ, then there are three. Jesus has turned up. Also a lifestyle change occurs. The believing spouse becomes involved with church at least on Sundays and usually other times too. The Bible probably appears, sometimes on the bedside cabinet. The believer's values will most likely change as faith becomes important. Spending habits may change and tensions over giving may arise.

When young people become Christians, it can become problematical for both them and their parents, even brothers and sisters. When I became a sincere believer I soon felt a distancing in relationships because my faith made my family very uncomfortable. We mustn't feel the least bit guilty about any of this. That's life. The point we are making is this: We need to understand and deeply empathise with other members of our families when we come to Christ. This is because when we are 'born again' of the Holy Spirit the Bible says we became a new creation. We become a new and different person. The old person has died, and a new person has been raised to life. Our partners and other members of our family didn't have a choice in this.

They are in real terms now relating to a new person. We have to convince them that this is going to bless them, not curse them. It is quite simple really. **Their experience of the new person should be so good that there is no way they would want the old person back again.** Our partners and families need

to be more loved and feel more loved. They need to be more valued, honoured, respected and accepted and feel more valued and accepted. They need to know for certain that none of this is conditional on them coming to faith.

1 Peter 3:1. If any of your husbands do not believe the word, you wives may be able to win them over without words by your behaviour.

1 Peter 3:7. Husbands, In the same way be loving and considerate to your wives and treat them with all respect.

The Plumber Calls

14

WE are using our dear plumber to symbolise all tradespeople. This chapter is designed to emphasise the importance of how we speak and behave towards those who call at our homes to provide the many and various services such as electricians, joiners, builders, decorators, gardeners, cleaners, mechanics, sales people, etc. The seeds of this teaching lie in my personal experience of working as a self-employed landscape gardener from the age of sixty to sixty seven. What an eye opener that was. I undertook many contracts and worked for all kinds of people, including many who would identify themselves as Christians. This is a very sad thing for me to say but generally the way I was treated by Christians was often particularly poor compared to many who were not Christians. This I admit is a dreadful generalisation and apologise to the few beautiful Christians I did work for. I never came to understand it and still don't.

The majority of my contracts were extensive and I would usually spend a number of weeks laying drives, paths and patios, building walls, putting up fencing and laying lawns etc. This provided the opportunity to gradually get to know my customers and for them to get to know me. When those who were Christians discovered my history as a pastor and the ongoing contribution I was making in volunteer ministry to various churches and mission trusts, their behaviour towards me would suddenly and dramatically change. Why would a whole new respect emerge that had not been offered to Michael the tradesman. It is a tragedy. I was listening to an exceptionally gracious Bible teacher on a God T.V channel one evening when he shocked me by saying, *"Over the past few decades the Church has been very good at evangelism."* I couldn't have disagreed with him more. He paused and then explained, *"What I mean is this. The Church has been very successful in evangelising people away from the Church."* What a shocking indictment. It must have taken much courage, or frustration, for this

highly regarded minister to say what he did. If I hadn't been a committed Christian, my experience of Christian customers in my role as a landscape gardener would have persuaded me that I was better off keeping away from churches and church people. I am so sorry to have to be as direct as this, but it is imperative that we face realities if we are going to advance God's kingdom. I recall listening to a highly prominent Christian pastor and speaker at a leader's conference. He was describing his rise to success. *"My careers teacher told me I was 'only' fit to become a plumber, and look at me now!"* My heart was deeply grieved, and I suspect too was the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 2:14. *'But thank God. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are like a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God.'*

Lord, let it be! When anyone calls at our homes let us be a sweet perfume. Let us treat our trades-people as royalty. Give them the absolute respect and honour they deserve, not just for the remarkable skills that they offer but simply as people. The message of Christ is not delivered only through words but through our heart attitudes and our behaviours. The truth is that God in his great wisdom and humility chose for his Son to spend his time on earth as a carpenter. Peter and John were described by the religious elite as ordinary working men. The great apostle Paul was a tentmaker. Jesus chose fishermen as some of his disciples. In my teaching career, my specialist subjects were woodwork, metalwork technical drawing and design. The headmaster called me into his office one day to discuss my future. *"Mr. Towle, you are wasted in the workshops. I want to arrange a year's secondment for you on full pay. I want to send you for specialist training so you can fulfil your potential and become a headmaster."* It was well intended and complementary and I was grateful for his interest in my career but he had completely missed the point. I chose workshops as a career because I loved practical work, valued it as highly as academic disciplines, and was convinced that I could serve the students just as well in my chosen specialism.

Practically everyone has heard of Smith Wigglesworth, a mighty man of God who had a miraculous healing ministry. He just happened to be a plumber by trade. When tradespeople come to our homes we must treat them in the same way as we would a valued friend. The opportunity to share our faith is very likely to emerge and likely to be received respectfully because we have first shown every kindness and respect.

One Foot in the Grave

15

THIS chapter is dedicated to the aged and the ageing. We ourselves fit neatly into this category. Please pray this after us:

I am invaluable. I am needed.

I am an amazing resource for the Kingdom of God and the Church.

I have time, wisdom, experience and availability.

I am going to make a difference to the world around me. I will stop using the term retired. This is a time of tremendous opportunity and I am not going to miss it. One foot in the grave?

Not yet. More like both feet in heaven.

Listen aging friends, we have time to gossip the gospel, a lifetime of testimonies, we have gifts and skills developed and honed over years, we have children and grandchildren to pass on our spiritual inheritance to and anyone else who desires it. We have time to visit the sick and needy. We have time to listen to people's troubles, to give wise advice and to pray. Let us keep our zeal and our passion, let us infect the following generation with that same passion for Christ, and expect that the best is yet to come. We don't want to see anyone of our generation miss out on what could be the most fruitful time of life. Whatever our circumstances, we are able to serve the passions of our Saviour to seek and save the lost, and to make disciples according to the instructions he left us with just before he went back to heaven.

Have you noticed how aging fruit trees can in their maturity carry masses of fruit. This is how we should see ourselves. These can be our most fruitful years. We will mention just two ageing folk, less mobile than they used to be, who chose to bless people with their letter writing.

Mrs. Elsie Batterham was a farmer's wife. The farm was a wheat and sheep farm in the Western Australian outback. My brother and I, with my dad, lived on this farm for a time when we first emigrated. When, many years later, we returned to England, Elsie was delighted to hear that I had become a Christian and passionately hoped that my brother would too. So, she began to write to him. He was habitually antagonistic, even aggressive to anyone, particularly me, who spoke about faith in God, but while in Australia, he had grown to love Elsie like a mother. He had the very highest regard for her and she was altogether worthy of it. She had a most beautiful spirit and was sweetness through and through. She was outrageously bold about her faith in a way that couldn't offend. Not even my brother. Her love of God and Jesus was profound and it oozed through her letters. One day my brother dared to show me one. It opened, *"Dear Roger, in the wonderful sweet name of my glorious saviour Jesus, how are you?"* It went on from there. Sweetness poured out. She didn't confront him with Gospel but simply wrote as someone overcome by the love of Christ. From the remoteness and isolation of the outback, she dedicated herself to witness to those she cared about through letter writing. Wow! What a testimony for us to learn from and be encouraged by. Each of us is unique, and each of us has been uniquely gifted by God for witnessing his love.

[Brenda: Tom has now gone to be with the Lord. I bet he received an exceptional reception when he arrived in heaven. What a beautiful man he was. Tom could bless without saying a word. Simply being in his presence was a blessing. He became treasurer of our overseas missionary trust, which gives support pastorally and administratively to a large number of missionaries in different parts of the world. He spent many hours not just managing finances, but writing letters from home to all of these missionaries. He would keep them up to date and write encouragement and pray faithfully. What a remarkable ministry from someone nearing the end of his life. Whenever our missionaries came home on furlough, they would give glowing testimonies of how they were strengthened and encouraged through difficult times. Bless you Tom.]

Dear Lord, show us how to make the most of our latter years.

Strike! You can start a Chain Reaction

16

FIRST a word about the title. Strike is a word used in the game of ten pin bowling. When the ball is rolled and strikes one of the pins, this will collide with others. If all the pins go down the cry goes up 'Strike'. Everyone cheers.

Do you know how Billy Graham found his salvation? Billy was the son of a dairy farmer and lived in rural Carolina. An evangelical tent crusade was held in a town near where he lived but he had no interest in going.

However, Billy had a friend who was a devoted Christian and who wanted to see Billy become one too. I believe his name was Carl Tuttle but I am open to correction on that. Carl invited Billy to go to the crusade with him. He invited him three times but Billy kept refusing. As it happened, Carl owned a rather nice truck and Billy had always wanted to drive it. *"Listen Billy, I'll do a deal with you. If you come with me to the crusade, you can drive my truck all the way there, and all the way back. There is one condition though. You have to stay in the tent all through to the finish of the meeting."* This was too much of a temptation for Billy. He agreed. We all know what followed. Billy became the greatest evangelist of all time.

Literally millions of people world- wide came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, all because Carl Tuttle was faithful, and determined to fulfil the call of Jesus to be his witness.

Next we have to account for the vast number of people that came to Christ through those who were brought to Christ through Billy Graham's ministry. I was one of them. I am fully aware that many of those who I have led to Christ have gone on to be his witnesses. Is the title of this chapter making sense now? A nuclear explosion occurs through a chain reaction. So Carl can be credited with a vast number of people finding Jesus through his witness. I ask a question that I do not know the answer to. Who led Carl Tuttle to Jesus?

Consider this. If you only lead one person to faith in a lifetime, you have no idea how many saved souls may be credited to your faithfulness through that person and those who follow. The dear Christian souls who helped to engineer my salvation do not know what followed. Does this help you to grasp what I choose to call 'Kingdom Mathematics' and encourage you to persist in your witness in every opportunity. Remember the double glazing salesman we met earlier. Two hundred house-calls lead to one sale he told us. Trust me in this, if you make it your determined goal to lead at least one person to Christ in your lifetime, not missing any opportunity, you will yourself lead many to Christ.

I Did it My Way

17

THE purpose of this chapter is to help each of you to understand the importance of developing an easy, natural witnessing style that is in harmony with the absolutely unique person that God made you.

Too often the church has tried to develop or copy a methodology quite unsuited to individuals. In the story we told you about Carl Tuttle, who helped Billy Graham to find salvation, we were developing **a principle, not a method**. Not many of us own trucks anyway.

I was initiated into evangelistic activities by being sent door to door. I hated it. Not because I am particularly shy, but because I felt it to be an uninvited intrusion. I was trespassing. Not only that, I never saw fruit through this method and didn't see anyone I knew bearing fruit either. I get the impression that there are those who do. It is right for them and I truly applaud their endeavours. Bless you friends. However, I am very relational by temperament, and it didn't take me long to realise that I didn't need to meet people at their doors when it was perfectly easy to meet them off their premises on neutral ground. **People are everywhere** and I find it easy to strike up a conversation anywhere. That's me so that is how I do it. As a teacher I was comfortable and natural in inviting other teachers to my lunch time Bible studies. Those who came received the gospel willingly. I do it my way. You do it your way.

One Christian lady who had moved to a new house asked my advice on how to reach her new neighbours with the message of Jesus. "Without trying", I replied. How would you feel about holding a coffee morning for them? Don't have any agenda except to get to know them and explain that is your reason for the invitation. It is possible that during the conversations that emerge you may be asked about your interests. If it is appropriate, share a little about your involvement in church life simply as part of your story. Just wait and see what happens, if it happens." She was enthusiastic about this and arranged a coffee morning. As it turned out one of the ladies showed interest in her faith and became a Christian within the week following. Friends, just be yourselves and go with the flow of the Holy Spirit, remaining alert for the opportunities he provides.

Tools of the Trade – Man in a White Van

18

*Ephesians 4:11-16. These are the people Jesus Christ has gifted and given to God's Church. They are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors. **Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do God's work and be able to build up the church which is the body of Christ.***

This chapter is an appeal to all of us to become as equipped as we can be to do the work of witnessing. I recognise that this is hardly ever a high priority with those who lead churches, so I set myself the task many years ago to reach out to God and give myself over to his teaching, the teaching of Jesus, and the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit. I asked them to equip me directly. I did attend teaching courses on evangelism where I could find them but didn't relate to them all that well. For me, much of the methodology seemed contrived.

After handing over our church, for six months I was contracted to a block paving company as a trouble shooter. The trouble was that the team that had laid paving at premises all over West Yorkshire for the previous eighteen months, had, to say the least, done very shoddy work. The comeback was awesome. Every day the company received phone calls from very angry customers. It became my task to investigate these complaints, and where possible, fix the problems and make the customers happy. I was provided with a white van and all the practical tools and equipment I needed to complete repairs. After twenty years of church leadership, I was already well equipped with the pastoral skills needed to deal with the anger of the customers. My first request to the company boss was to ask if I could work with the paving team for a week so I could assess their methods and try to understand why so many drives and patios were sinking and collecting pools of water. I was confounded that the boss hadn't already done this himself but gradually it became clear that he was afraid of having a confrontation with the men he employed. I learned invaluable lessons about every way *not* to lay a block paving drive. Happily it was not my responsibility to confront the team so I simply thanked them tongue in cheek for teaching me so much about block paving. They had indeed!

Jesus frequently taught through the use of parables. I am sure you have recognised that I am using the man in a white van as a parable. Firstly, with regard to being capable and effective with our witnessing for Jesus we need to understand how not to do it, and how not to produce angry customers. It is a tragedy that so many people have been put off Christianity and have become angry with the Church because like the block paving team they have done it so carelessly and with so little knowledge and skill. When making first face to face contact with customers, **empathy was my best tool.** They were in need of understanding, sympathy, compassion, patience and above all a listening ear. I would encourage them to explain their anger, disappointment and frustration. I would agree with them where it was appropriate, which was most of the time. I would not make excuses for the company. Then I would explain that from here on, I would accept responsibility for ensuring the work would be done properly. I was always astounded at how quickly these furious customers undertook a change or attitude.

I would explain that my first task was to do a thorough site investigation to discover where the problems lay. This could easily prompt, *"Would you like a cup of tea before you start?"* The first tool out of the van was a really long spirit level. I would meticulously test all areas with this first. Some customers would comment, *"The other men that came didn't use one of those."* I had already worked that out. Then using other tools I would take up a few blocks from suspect areas and check the foundations. Where mortar had been used I would check its hardness to see whether sufficient cement was in the mix. In principle I was diagnosing the real problems before attempting a repair. The parable doesn't need explaining does it? Before jumping in with an ill considered and untimely crude presentation of the gospel, we will be wise to take time to listen to people first and discover their 'spirit level'. Check out their foundations. Give them confidence in us. Often they have been badly let down and we don't need to be defensive.

Clearly there are other basic, important and necessary tools for our witness kit. One is a good knowledge of the scriptures, particularly those regarding the truths of salvation. Prayers of intercession are a necessity. An ability to listen to the Holy Spirit and experience his empowering is an obvious equipping need. We must be equipped with a readiness to speak boldly about our faith at the right time. People are full of difficult questions and it is important to know how to provide wise answers. There are useful books written about this. Our personal testimony of how we came to believe is a very effective tool. Light heartedness and humour are a great help. I will leave you to add to the list, add to your tool kit as you go. When my family ask me what I want for a present at Christmas, or birthday time, they already know the answer. *"A tool."* I say. Then I specify which one I want to add to my kit. Keep asking the Lord for new tools to add to your witness kit. He is very generous.

Community, Community, Community

19

MUCH evangelism can generally be described as ‘come to us evangelism’. Developing personal friendships and inviting those friends to church services or events can be very successful in leading people to Christ. We always strongly encourage this.

However, the great commission of Jesus calls upon us to go to all peoples everywhere to give witness. Good deeds are a great witness.

Going into our communities and demonstrating the unconditional love of Jesus speaks with a loud voice and bridges the gap between communities and the church.

When I read a book entitled *‘The Church Unleashed’* by the pastor of Bear Valley Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado, I was hugely impressed. The Pastor was a Native American called Frank Tillapaugh. His book was written with such compassion and concern for the communities of Denver that when I planned a visit to the States with another Church leader in connection with our Church’s healing ministry, I wrote to Frank and asked if I we could spend a week at his Church to gain some experience of what his book promoted. We were given wonderful hospitality by one of the senior leaders and his wife and they guided us through the week to give us maximum exposure to the work of the Bear Valley Church. Frank himself spent a lot of time with us explaining the principles he worked from and we were able to visit a number of the twenty six ongoing community projects that had been established from those principles.

The Church was expanding rapidly at the time of our visit, mainly through the addition of new believers who were all being effectively included in a discipleship program. The congregation had reached about twelve hundred and was growing weekly. One of the principles that Frank insisted on was that no more than fifty percent of the people were to service the activities of the church

so that the other fifty percent could be released unhindered to serve the works in the community. Another of the principles that he insisted upon was that **each community work was to be founded through the vision, inspiration, and leadership of individuals**. This produced a remarkable variety of works. The very first inspiration came through a lady with skills in pottery. She bought a kiln and potter's wheels and started to give classes free of charge. During these sessions conversations and friendships developed and she began to share her faith. As her students became believers they were added to the church. Others in the church followed her example

A married couple who were both doctors, decided to set up a free medical clinic for those who could not afford insurance, releasing their time by living on half a salary each. Three derelict connected houses were purchased by one group, and volunteers from the church renovated them so they could be made available for homeless people. One couple developed a vision for welcoming overseas students coming to Denver University. Each Fresher's week they arranged a free high class dinner for the new students, providing them with the opportunity to connect with caring families as they settled in. Homesick students were exceptionally blessed by this and many were saved and joined Bear Valley Church. And so I could go on.

[Brenda: Back on home ground: a dedicated married couple we knew felt called to take over a pub on a council estate near our church and use it as a base to help the surrounding community. Their first step was to begin having an informal Sunday morning Christian service in one of the pub rooms, providing an opportunity for customers to join in if they chose to.

Secondly, they enquired from customers what they thought the needs of the estate were. This information was passed on to local churches to enlist the help of volunteers. The community needs expressed included a Junior football club, a mum's and tots group, a slimming club, pub quizzes, and trips out for older people, a youth club, etc. Within a few days of Michael receiving the list, volunteers for many of these needs came forward from our church and pledges of financial help put in place.

My task was to manage the slimming club. Preparations were made for the first morning. I dressed like a consultant from Weight Watchers looking very smart! I expected the ladies to sit in neat rows and listen attentively.

However, this was going to be very different from any slimming clubs I had been to myself. The women descended with all their offspring. There were endless interruptions with mothers stopping their children fighting, taking them out to the toilet, mopping up spilt juice, etc. I decided there and then to give my talks sitting with them at the pub tables. The following week I went armed with toys and the children settled down much more quickly. Over the following months

all the women lost weight and thoroughly enjoyed themselves as I resorted to much humour in my deliveries. The children were linked to the church through fun days and other church routines. I had opportunities to share my faith along the way.

When our church was early in its development and meeting at the local community centre, we wanted to become even more visible in our town. In response to the dedicated sacrifice of time and money from a few of our members, we were able to purchase premises on the main road through the town. Under my management, we were able to set up a cafe, craft-shop and Christian bookshop, as a bridge into the community. Additionally, missionaries on furlough could use part of the premises as living accommodation. One of our church members was the son of the owner of a Chinese restaurant. He used his skills to give free cooking lessons in the cafe. It was a great facility too for youth work.]

Every one of us is endowed with particular gifts and skills that we can offer to our communities. We can ask God to reveal these to us and plant a vision in our hearts. My time as a school teacher has enabled me to offer help to schools. One project involved assisting a CDT teacher with his Saturday club for disadvantaged pupils. What could be more appropriate than to make my own specialism available?

My skills as a landscape gardener were very helpful with a project to build a 'Peace Garden' at this same school, where staff and students could meditate and pray. A married couple that I know used the freedom of their retirement to work with local schools in helping children with learning difficulties to read. The possibilities are endless.

Scaffold Man

20

WHEN buildings are being built, it is necessary to erect scaffolding so that the builders can build the building. The scaffolders do no direct building. What they do is to provide a safe platform for the builders. In the realm of mission and evangelism, scaffold people are indispensable to those in the front line. Think about the Billy Graham crusades. A highly skilled team of administrators and technicians were needed to provide Billy with the opportunity to preach to thousands in stadiums all over the world. He needed finance to be provided through generous people. He needed accountants and book keepers. None of these people spoke at rallies, but without them Billy wouldn't be speaking either. Every charity requires a team of trustees that includes a chairperson, a secretary, an accountant, a minute secretary, a book keeper and others.

At the time of writing I am a trustee of an overseas mission trust that serves twenty six mission works spread across the world, and the Chairman of Leeds Faith In Schools, a charity that enables an excellent team of young Christian men and women to serve in many of the cities secondary schools. I do no front line face to face witnessing with either of these charities. My role is that of a facilitator and the fruit of that work probably surpasses all the face to face work I have done where I have seen people come to Christ directly. I help to enable other charities to fulfil their purposes simply by giving money. If the opportunity arises, we can always work for, and give to, charities that have a vision we are enthusiastic about.

From Michael & Brenda with Love

21

THANK YOU for reading our book. You have read it we presume because you already share the heart of Jesus in seeking and saving the lost. We do hope you feel more confident and better equipped. You will have discovered that we each come to Jesus through a chain of events and a chain of people each playing their part, large or small, dramatic or mundane, spoken or unspoken.

We hope you have grasped firmly the understanding that even a single person that you help to find Christ is most likely to lead to others to finding him too. We hope also that as you demonstrate faithfulness in witnessing, other Christians will catch your vision. We write in the belief that particular chapters will speak to particular people in particular ways and are content that...

if just one paragraph helps you to reach just one person and their soul is saved, then in Kingdom economy, where one soul is more valuable than the whole world, we will mightily rejoice.

When you give your heart to the lost, you honour our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when we honour them this is what the scriptures say:

Malachi 3:16-17. Then those who feared the Lord spoke to each other, and the Lord listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honour of his name. They will be my people," says the Lord of Heaven.

We pray, "Lord may this book be instrumental in the Salvation of many Souls."

May the Lord Bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make his face shine upon you.

May the Lord give you a piece of the action.

School of E^oangelism

Mike and Brenda Towle have spent their lives involved in many exploits for the Kingdom of God, including Church leadership and consultancy. However, their greatest passion has always been helping people find faith and connect with the God who loves them. They have seen countless people healed and transformed.

They have spent their latter ministry focussed on teaching those with faith in Jesus to share Him with others, through a series of accessible and inspiring teaching. Chain reaction is the first of these books. Mike and Brenda live in Leeds and have two grown-up children and three grandchildren and Mike oversees a School of Evangelism with a small team.