

THE JOURNEY

The Story of John Yates

John Yates

Published by Clarion Call Ministries

The Journey by John Yates
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Cover illustration

Top: Preston city centre; John Yates, Tinali, Andhra Pradesh

Middle: Coventry Cathedral, The Green, Meriden

Bottom: Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight

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Church, Fulwood, I set up the Christian Care and Counselling Centre with the help of Fred Kenny, the Vicar at the church. He was great at encouraging folk to come in, seek counselling and have fellowship.

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FOREWORD

Reading John Yates' striking story of his wanderings and of how he was led in the end to the right source of help, the right wife, the right place to be and the right work for him to do, brought to mind the words of the apostle Paul when he claims that, "God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, what is weak in the world to shame the strong; what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing the things that are, so that none of us might boast in the presence of God!"

What an amazing story of the work of grace this is! That man who I learned, when I was Bishop in Coventry, to regard as a kind of vividly erratic ally, had begun as a small boy weakened by illness and nightmares. Then he was a young man coming out of military service with a drink problem, his first marriage swiftly broken, one of the homeless sleeping out, and coming to the Cyrenians, or the Salvation Army hostel for help. Later he was, after a brief respite, still an alcoholic, a potential criminal, serving a brief time in prison, and when, at length, he was given a council flat in Willenhall, Coventry, sitting in it alone and in despair. Yet that small boy had known a devout grandmother whose influence touched him, a clear moment of awareness of God's hold upon him, a brief flash of conversion at the hands of the Salvation Army, and eventually, when despair in the flat he felt he was drowning for lack of God, the words of Christian influencers reached him and he cried out, "Jesus help me!" and at once was lifted up.

From the moment that Ernie Norman, pastor of the Willenhall Evangelical Church told him that he had a gift of being able to make people aware of spiritual things, the one who had felt himself a loser, suddenly began to gain all he needed. He was still plunged into a spiritual battle with evil, but he was being restored and breaking through to a new life. After his early vision, shared by other faithful helpers, of mission in the 'Heart of England', he was still a wanderer, feeling himself sent from place to place, but he returned to Coventry and the vision. Then came a wild excursion to India but it was through this that he met Pam. Pam, who when he returned was to leave her base on the Isle of Wight, to become the wife and partner in mission who could help him at last to ensure the fulfilment of his early vision. The tale of that combined ministry centred in the village of Meriden gradually winning a place in the heart of the community, listening to and encouraging and nurturing others, the dream of a Meriden Festival, 'celebrating all that is good in the heart of England', all this is indeed a miraculous re-creation of a life, and, through that, of other lives.

Rightly, John ends the book with an invitation to others to discover as he has, this, infinitely repeated, new beginning. I hope and pray that many a reader will respond, when they see what can happen to any of us once we can yield ourselves to this transforming power of grace!

The Rt Revd Simon Barrington-Ward
Former Bishop of Coventry

Chapter One

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

I was born in September 1940 during the period of the Blitz. I was the eldest of four, and we were brought up on a council estate in Armfield Street, Bell Green, Coventry. In 1945 I started school at St. Lawrence's Old Church School, Coventry. By the time I was seven years old I had contracted a disease called St. Vitus's Dance, which I think was caused by malnutrition, and I suffered with this complaint for a couple of years. My father died when I was only twelve years old, leaving me completely devastated, as I had been very close to him. His death affected me greatly and life became very difficult as my mother was suffering at the time with a heart condition.

I attended Broad Heath Secondary Modern School, Coventry, from which I graduated at the age of fifteen and started work as an apprentice painter and decorator. After only two years of being in this apprenticeship, my mother suffered a fatal heart attack and died. I was only seventeen and had to go through the trauma of seeing my home split up. I was too young at the time to take over the tenancy of the council house and sadly my sister was taken into council care, as was my brother. Another brother went into the army apprentices, and so the family was scattered.

I remember how when I was very young, perhaps six or seven, I was sent off to a Methodist Church. Every Sunday afternoon I was encouraged to go there by my mother. I remember going quite often to this Methodist Sunday School. Collecting my stamp for attendance is very vivid in my mind. I graduated

to be a Life Boy and attended quite well. I wore a hat which was very similar to a sailor's hat. From time to time I was also encouraged to go into the Sunday morning service at the Church, and it seemed that during the time I attended the Church it was always packed out. Everybody in those days, it seemed, went to Church. My Grandmother Gregory, from my mother's family, was a great influence upon my life without me realising it. She was a Methodist and a godly woman. She used to come from Blackburn in Lancashire to visit us in Coventry. She would come and spend time trying to persuade us to read and to do things which we weren't doing but which would help us more when we were grown up. I used to hear her about the house talking to God and sometimes praying. She was a great influence, and I'm convinced that where I am today is a result of my Grandmother Gregory's prayers. Just after the war things were very hard. The nearest gas works was probably about three to four miles away, and we used to go there with a trolley or a truck to haul big bags of coke back home to supplement the heat. This was because coal was so dear and coke was very cheap. I have vivid memories of struggling to cart the coke home with my brother, having queued for hours to get it.

I was very good at sports at school. I excelled at cricket and played for the local school I attended. I also played rugby and was in the cross country team. Looking back the problem I had with the St. Vitus's Dance was something that held me back academically, because I constantly had to go and visit the doctor. My mother would come and take me from school to the clinic where I would meet with the specialist so he could examine me. On one occasion I was put in hospital. I was a bit of a loner because of my problems with the illness. I went into deep depression at times and spent long periods on my own. I also suffered with nightmares. I remember waking up screaming and shouting on many occasions. My mother and father would say that I used to sleep walk. They would find me in the kitchen at night and would send me back to bed. Obviously I don't remember any of that.

There was one occasion when I was sitting in a field one day, and I remember having an awareness come over me. Somehow it was like a spiritual experience and I became aware that I would never die. I wondered how anyone could ever die or consciously not know where they were. On reflection I think that God was beginning to break through into my life, and perhaps give me some indication that there was more to life than I was experiencing or even knew about. It wasn't until I became a Christian much later on in life that I really began to waken up. It was then that God started to heal a lot of the issues I had from the past.



John, 8 years old

Chapter Two

A SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS

After the breakup of my family and home I gave up my apprenticeship with the company I was with. I had to very quickly find digs and a position where I could earn money in order to look after myself. I was called up for National Service at eighteen and did my basic training at Fulwood Barracks, Preston. By the end of June 1959 I was in Malaya. I served in Malaya and Germany as a Physical Training Instructor, but damaged my back while undertaking an assault course. This left me with a permanent back disability.

I was in the army until 1963, when I was demobbed. When I came out of the army I had a severe drink problem. Before entering the army I had never drunk.

Just after coming out of the forces I met my first wife, and was married very quickly by the September of 1963. I had rushed into marriage looking for love. After two years the marriage collapsed and once more I found myself alone in the world. I turned to alcohol and found I could not hold down my job because of the drink. All the problems I had in my life were spiralling out of control. I drifted in and out of jobs, all the time the drinking was getting worse. I was keeping unsavoury acquaintances who led me into all sorts of trouble, even with the police on several occasions. I dabbled with marijuana, which eventually led me to leaving Coventry and drifting to the coast. For long periods I was out of work and living off Social Security.

This was an exceptionally dark period in my life. I was extremely

lonely and depressed, and wandered the streets with no job and no home. Life seemed to be going on all around me, but I was not part of it. I seemed to exist in a world of my own on a different level to other people.

During this time I had several Social Security claims in different parts of the country, all under different names. Therefore I had to travel around to be at various DSS offices in order to receive giros. These giros were invariably spent on drink in one day! Life was an existence. I begged, walked the streets and sat in cafes while living from one giro to the next. There was a sense of hopelessness and a constant drifting back to Coventry. At one stage I was sleeping under the steps of the Coventry Swimming Baths. Here there was an air shaft blowing out warm air that would keep me relatively warm and I could get a reasonable night's sleep, albeit rather rough. On other occasions I slept where I could. The drink problem meant I was in no condition to look for anywhere more suitable. There were some occasions, however, when I queued for a long time to be allowed to stay in the Cyrenian Shelter. They would give me a bowl of soup and a mattress on the floor for a night.

Chapter Three

THE MEETING

Life carried on in much the same way. One day as I was wandering around aimlessly someone said to me, “John, have you ever been to the Salvation Army Hostel? They will take you in without any money.” So on a Saturday night in March 1972 I went to the Hostel. I found it degrading to have to present myself with no money and no earthly goods whatsoever, and to have to beg for help. The Major asked me many questions before eventually offering me accommodation for the night. The long bleak dormitory had the stench of urine. I felt isolated and lonely with no one to help or confide in. I had reached the point where I could not get any lower or more degraded.

On the Sunday morning we were offered the opportunity to go into the meeting, the alternative being to go back onto the street. If you stayed in the meeting you were given a cup of tea, and that for me was the lure! When I went into the room, which was full of elderly vagrants, I was probably the youngest there. I sat on the side bench, not facing the front, and the Major (in uniform) started to preach. He spoke about the love of God in such a way as I had never heard before, and this began to have a huge impact on me.

As I sat on the bench I began to realise that outside of the problems I had, there was the possibility of a God who loved me. It took me several days to mull over and think about what I had heard. I then approached the Major, who said that God was talking to me, and in some way I wanted to know more. The outcome of this was that the Major put me on the staff at

the Hostel. After a short time I was taken to the local Salvation Army Corp outside the Hostel in Stoke, Coventry, where I was made very welcome. After about three weeks attending, one Sunday in March 1972, I responded to the Gospel call and went forward to give my life to Christ at the Mercy Seat.

On that Sunday night when I went back to the Hostel there was something happening in my mind and body which I could not understand - a shivering and a shaking. The following morning, when I woke up, everything seemed so clean and bright and colourful. Everything was different. I spoke to the Major about it and he told me that it was the Holy Spirit working in my life. Soon after that I was contacted by the Officer of the Stoke Salvation Army Corp to give my testimony the following Sunday. This seemed very daunting to me, and for most of that week I practised and rehearsed what I was going to say on the Sunday evening. When Sunday evening came, I stood up to give my testimony and it seemed to go very well. People seemed to respond to it, and afterwards a man came up to me who said he was going to write to me. The man's name was Arthur Ford.

After a few days (while still living at the Hostel) I received a letter from Arthur giving a brief outline of his life and Christian conversion. He also said that if I needed more help and support I could contact him. This I did by going to visit him, and he took me to the Stoke Corp. Arthur disciplined me and encouraged me to begin Bible study. Most of all he became my friend.

Sometime during this period I moved out of the Salvation Army Hostel and found myself living at Manor House, a council run Hostel which was a step better than the Army Hostel. Now I had my own room and there was a communal lounge with a television. However what I needed to understand was that I had to give the whole of myself to Christ, burdens and problems included, and to let Him take complete control. At first I did not understand this, and for the next six years (1973 - 1979) I struggled with Christianity. I became very backslidden and

returned to my old style of life.

These six years were spent drifting from one place to another, mainly Preston, Leicester and back to Coventry. I was living rough again and started getting into the wrong company. I was often in trouble with the police, even being put on probation at one point. What I really wanted to do was to run away from everything I knew, especially Coventry. Wherever I went my problems followed. I could not hide from them. These were six long meaningless years of despair.

During that time I was very troubled and would often get very depressed. Things came to a head when one night I got into further trouble with the Police. I'd been in Coventry drinking quite a lot on my own. For no reason, when I was simply passing a cinema, I decided to smash my way into the foyer. I don't know what I was trying to achieve when I was breaking into the kiosk, but I was so drunk that the Police came and picked me up. I was then deposited in Winston Green Prison. I can't remember now, looking back, what the outcome of that was, but it was something that I remember was major at that time. Towards the end of this period I was also planning to break into an office to rob a safe. There was a person I'd started associating with who had some information of where there was some money in this office. He was going to give me the information and I was going to do the job. Fortunately it never happened and God somehow began to intervene in my life and averted the whole thing.

On one occasion I was put on probation for quite some time. I can't remember how long it was now, but during that period I also had some outstanding fines to pay. There was one fine that I didn't pay for some time (mainly because I just didn't have the money) and a committal order had been placed on me which I had no idea about. When I went to make a payment I was taken to Winston Green Prison where I served several months for the non-payment of the fine. Life went on like that, up and down for six years. At some stage I remembered that I'd put my name

on the Council list in Coventry for a Council house. This had been several years before, and I applied again for Council house accommodation. They did, in fact, give me a flat, and this was probably about 1976

During this period I was also involved with stripping lead from roofs to take to the tatter's yard where we would get paid for it. Life seemed to be focused around the next giro, and where the next drink was coming from. This was a time when my life just seemed to be spent getting money however I could, and spending most days drinking bottles of cider and wasting my life. It was just an awful existence.

Chapter Four

JESUS HELP ME

I was now living on the Willenhall Council Estate in Coventry, in the flat where I had moved to in 1976.

The climax to these six years came when I was picked up for being drunk and disorderly and was taken into police custody. From there I was taken into Court and given a hefty fine before being sent home. At this time I was unemployed, partly because I still had problems with my back. Before the army I had trained as a painter and decorator, and to return to this trade would mean I would have to be really fit.

On Wednesday 14 March 1979 at 7.30 pm, I was sitting on my chair in my flat, and it suddenly hit me that I was completely on my own and that my life lay in tatters and ruin. I was at rock bottom. I was in debt, couldn't pay my rent and had no more of my own resources left. Financially I had nothing, and I did not know how I would cope. Despair overwhelmed me. I realised now that Christian friends had been trying to teach me about Christ and I had held back. Suddenly a great fear hit me, and I felt like a man drowning without God in my life. The fear of that was awesome. A thought struck me that Christians had told me to relax and let Christ take over. So that was exactly what I did. As I sat there I relaxed, and as I did so I cried out from the very depth of my being, "Jesus, help me!" The cry had been from the very bottom of my heart and soul, and as I let go of everything I began to experience a release of burdens. I could feel them physically being lifted through my body and then lifted out. My eyes had been closed, and I felt I could see the darkness going past my eyes

as the burdens and problems were being dealt with and lifted out of my body. As the experience passed I felt a great sense of peace and calm and a feeling of being set free. I began to praise God for what Jesus was doing at that moment. Jesus was now in the centre of my life, where He should have been in 1972.

The morning after this experience, a man I knew called round to my flat. On seeing me he exclaimed, "John, you have changed, you look different." I had to tell him I had committed my life to Christ and that I would not be going out with him any more. He wished me well and went away.

While living on that Estate in Willenhall I had become aware of a little church called Willenhall Free Evangelical Church in the centre of the community. I knew in my heart that on the following Sunday I was going to go to that church. On that Sunday I went to the evening service. There was a long path from the road up to the church itself. This was a real battle for me, as I was worried that somebody might see me. However, when I entered the church there was only a handful of people and a lady playing her guitar and singing. It was a very emotional service for me. With the release in my life I found it hard to cope with all the emotions. One of the men from the congregation came up to me afterwards and told me that they had had an all-night prayer meeting on the Saturday night. In it they had prayed specifically for men to come and join them. He said that they felt very encouraged by my presence.

Since that experience on Wednesday 14 March 1979 I have never had another alcoholic drink. I had just over half a packet of cigarettes left, and between the Wednesday and the Saturday I made the most of that packet of cigarettes (even smoking old nub ends!) From that first Sunday in the Willenhall Church I would never smoke again. The Lord has taken away the desire to smoke and has cleaned me up.

I started attending Willenhall Free Evangelical Church. After

a few weeks they decided to extend the building and make a lounge. All the men in the Fellowship committed themselves to the building work. There was no one free to do the visiting and because I couldn't help with the building (because of the problems with my back) I offered to do it.

I started visiting people and informed them of the church and what the Lord had done in my life personally. People were becoming interested and contacts were being formed. It was soon after this that I started going out regularly into the area, and the Pastor of the Willenhall Church, Rev. Ernie Norman, told me that God had given me a gift of being able to make people aware of spiritual things. For me this became the starting point of everything that was to follow. After having seen myself as a loser all my life, this comment really inspired me to start to use the gift the Lord had given me. When I heard from Ernie that God had given me a gift I was like an athlete shooting out of the starting blocks and was just going for God. At that time I'd prayed and asked that if the Lord was to provide me with some finance I would put it back into His service and start to serve God. I had no idea of where I was going or what I was doing at that time. God gave me a large cheque which was some back money due to me from military service days. I used it to set up with a projector and screen, and could now start to do evangelism on the estates by showing 16 mm films and preaching the gospel. It was probably during this period while I was out and about getting started with evangelism that God provided me with help in the form of Evelyn Gibson. Evelyn was in the same church, and together with Nicky Wyndow, helped me with the typing and in the production of leaflets. I was beginning to sense that God was with me and noticed that people's lives were being changed. In particular it was the younger folk who were coming to Christ.

Another thing which is worth mentioning and which may help other people who have gone through or are going through a similar situation, is this. After Christ came into the centre of

my life and I started to attend the church, for a few weeks there seemed to be a continuous battle going on. One of the brothers in the church had a book which was called 'Deliverance from Evil' by Don Basham. He gave me this book and as I read through it I began to realise that I had problems within me, demons that had been affecting me all those years to be held and bound in bondage. I began to examine myself and my past life. There were things that I'd been involved with which I could never have talked to anyone else about because I would have been too ashamed. I had to admit that within me there were personalities and deep problems that were keeping me from what God wanted for my life. I faced up to the truth of admitting that these things were there, and I began to pray against them and renounce them in Jesus' name. I began to get free of things that for years had been binding me and holding me. Slowly but surely I was beginning to be set free, and came into a measure of victory for which I'd longed for all those years. God had finally brought me through it. All I wanted to do was to tell people what Jesus had done for me. My message was that what Jesus has done for me, He will do for you if you put your trust in Him.

As I began to get involved in the church in 1979 I began to go out visiting doors telling people, "Jesus did this for me, and He will do it for you". I was actually meeting people in the community who used to know me, and I found that people now were beginning to respect me and give me the time of day. It was just a wonderful time in my life. God was restoring me, and I wanted to encourage other people to be strong and face up to what God wanted to do in their lives. He honours the steps of faith that you take. He restores the years that the locusts have eaten. At that time I was beginning to gain respect from people, and it was so wonderful after all those years of struggle and defeat.

Chapter Five

THE VISION

It was in the autumn of 1979 that I received a vision for the Heart of England Outreach. One day when I was out visiting on Willenhall Wood Estate, I became aware of a path leading to a house and I knew that the Lord wanted me to knock on the door. I knocked on the door and recognised the person who answered as a lady I had seen at least once before in the church at Willenhall. This lady invited me in and I remember saying to her, “How are you?” She looked at me and said, “Sometimes I’m alright and sometimes I’m not”. There was something else in her eyes looking at me. It seemed to be another identity. Although there was nothing said, the identity seemed to be saying, “I am here, what are you going to do about it?” I was terrified and the whole of my inside felt as if it was shaking. I suddenly decided to get out of the house and became frightened of what I was getting involved in.

I went home as quickly as possible and spent a long time praying about this incident. When I told Ernie Norman, the Pastor of Willenhall Church, he said that he knew of this family, and told me I had looked at an evil spirit. It was as if God allowed this incident to happen in order to show me what I was up against when involved in Christian ministry. This really changed me and helped me.

Just after this incident, while I was praying on my own in the flat, the presence of God became so powerful and He felt very near. I realised that God was trying to show me something. What He began to show me was the importance of the centre

of England. It was as if God was saying that He wanted His Kingdom presence established in the centre of England, and that from the centre of England His ministry would reach out to other areas and to other countries, locally and internationally. This was the starting point of the call to the vision of the Heart of England Outreach.

From here my desire to establish a ministry to fulfil the vision that the Lord had put in my heart began. I started to develop city wide outreach into schools and community centres in Coventry, including Wood End. Evelyn Gibson, a member of the Church at Willenhall, supported me in this outreach work. She became my first secretary and it was not until after I moved out of Willenhall that she became unable to help me.

I was offered better accommodation in Courthouse Green, and so I eventually moved out of Willenhall to the other side of the city. It felt right for me to form a committee for the Heart of England Outreach and also a constitution with key people around the city. A new secretary came in the form of Muriel Davenport. I also had quite a lot of help from a young man named Rob Wright. He became like a sidekick and was a great help in outreach and schools work.

As a new committee God put it into our hearts to pray about an office to develop the work from, and we became aware that an office was available in Kingsway, Stoke, Coventry. The Outreach had no support at that stage and the office was going to cost £25 per week. With no income this was going to be a big step of faith. The Lord gave me a scripture, 'The fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.' (Proverbs 29:25). The Lord showed me that I had to go forward in faith. The office had two rooms, and so we used one room as an office and the other as a counselling room. We called it the 'Christian Care Centre' and opened late 1981. By this time I had a small team of evangelists who were helping with the ministry, and people were coming into the Centre.

I was still involved in outreach after forming the committee, and in 1982 I was invited to a Church in Birmingham to give my testimony with a group from Operation Mobilisation. I was able to talk about the Christian Care Centre in Coventry and the work I was doing at that time. After the meeting a man came to me and introduced himself. He said that for a long time he had been thinking and praying about the possibility of a Coventry City Mission. It was not until later that I learned that he was the Director of the Birmingham City Mission.

After this I wrote to all the Churches in Coventry who I thought might be interested, asking them all to a meeting to hear a talk about the possibility of a Coventry City Mission. From this meeting Queens Road Baptist Church became involved. Coventry City Mission evolved, and I was asked to become the first Coventry City missionary. I had to decline the offer. It was shortly after this that an invitation came for me to move up to Preston, Lancashire, and start a Christian Counselling Centre there. I felt this was the way forward at the time. Fred Kenny, who was the vicar of St. Cuthbert's Church in Preston, Lancashire, had heard about the work that I was doing in Coventry. He wanted me to go up to Preston and to help them establish a Christian Counselling Centre at the church. I felt it was time to move on, and so in September 1983 I moved up to Preston.

For six years I served in Preston doing pioneer and outreach work. I gained a lot of experience there, and it was during this period that I met evangelist Derek Cook of Maranatha Ministries. I worked with Derek for a period of time, from a distance. His Centre was based in Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, and my involvement with him was to go around promoting his ministry, to set up meetings for him and to visit bookshops. Once a month we would get together at his Christian teaching Centre in Kirkby Stephen and have fellowship.

During my time in Preston I knew I was not where God ultimately

wanted me to be. I knew that God was preparing me to go back to the Heart of England ministry. One of the major things that happened when I was in Preston was that I was able to pass my driving test. This had been a major obstacle at that time.

Eventually the Lord opened the door for me to return back to Coventry at the beginning of 1989. A flat was given to me by Coventry City Council on Willenhall Wood Estate, where it had all begun for me. Shortly after, another flat was offered to me in Tile Hill Village. This was much better, and so I moved over to the other side of the city in November 1990. While in Tile Hill I established another committee for the Heart of England Outreach, and a lady called Christine became my secretary. She eventually went into full-time training for the Methodist Ministry and so another lady called Sue took her place.

There were three things I was involved with at that time:

1. I was raising funds of £20,000 in support of a local Youth Centre in Tile Hill Village, Coventry.
2. I was given an empty shop by Coventry City Council in Nickson Road, Tile Hill South, Coventry. This became known as the 'Community Care Centre'. It is still running today, and was handed over to the churches in Tile Hill, Coventry.
3. I was able to form a committee of city wide church leaders, council leaders, and others to develop the concept of a Coventry City Godiva Festival. This later came into being.

It was during this time that I first came into contact with the Reverend Michael Dawkins, who was the Vicar of Meriden. He helped me quite a lot with printing work and we became friends as he was very supportive in what I was doing. It was then that God showed me that Meriden was the place where he wanted me to be to fulfil the vision He had given me in 1979. I started to focus on establishing the Heart of England Outreach in Meriden.

Nicky Wyndow is a person who has always encouraged and

helped me. He has always been available to help with any preaching engagements, and is still helping today with the church in Meriden. He has been a faithful brother over the years. Shortly after first meeting with him, I'd said to Nicky that I was trying to get hold of some decent material which could teach me more about the things of God. He gave me a tape catalogue for Good News Crusade, which was the ministry of Don Double. That is how I first began to get to know about the Good News Crusade and Don Double's ministry.

At that time I was brought into contact with a brother who was serving God. He headed up a team in Coventry which was made up of members from different parts of the world called 'Friends from Abroad'. It was an Operation Mobilisation team. We got together later and I shared with him all that I was doing at the time. This was just before the Mission England programme with Billy Graham had begun. Along with the Pastor of the Broad Street Baptist Church in Coventry, and Ernie Norman, we formed the group which was the first committee through which God brought Heart of England Outreach into being. From that committee I was encouraged to continue to do evangelism in and around Coventry.

This work has always been a work of faith. It's believing that God is ordering something, that God wants something done. It has been a case of getting on with it and then God confirming it, and providing the means to fulfil what He has called me to do. It's believing God first, and then seeing the blessing of God on what He's produced through it.

Another strong emphasis of the work is to encourage individuals into the call of God for their life and ministry. This has been expressed through seminars and weekends of teachings on living the victorious Christian life, church commitment, and pioneer evangelism. It was in those areas (with the help of Nicky Wyndow, Ernie Norman and the influence of people like Don Double) that I have been able to find my way into what God

has been calling me to. To some extent I don't believe that we ever know completely the full extent of God's purpose for our lives. It's an ongoing process of walking, seeking, and knowing God's mind each step of the way. God's purpose for our lives is an unfolding story. It's never exhausted and so wonderful that through it all we are being changed from glory to glory. He's developing and changing our character, moulding us and knocking the rough edges off. He's producing something that He wants to achieve in our lives, as the illustration about the potter and the clay illustrates in Isaiah 64:8.

I believe that there isn't any retirement in the Kingdom of God. I do believe that there are adjustments, a time that comes when we adjust and don't do as much, but I don't believe that there is any retirement. Even today the dream of Heart of England Outreach is fulfilled much more now than it was nearly twenty-five years ago, but it isn't there yet. I'm just longing for the time when the Lord will say to me, "John, you've fulfilled what I've called You to do". But I know that even then there will still be other work to do within that same vision. It will never be exhausted. It will be ongoing and developing. The call of God is so wonderful on our lives because it's God's plan and purpose.

There have been times when people have said, "Why don't you give up on this thing about Heart of England Outreach? It is never going to happen; the concept has never taken off." This was how it was in the early days. Even in the first ten to fifteen years people were still questioning it. It has taken years of trusting God and waiting for the fruit to come out of what I've followed Him to do. Other church leaders and individuals are now beginning to see, "Yes, there must be something in what God is doing with John Yates". After all, it's the fruit that the Bible says they will know you by. It's the fruit that comes out of what we're called to do that will speak volumes to other people. It is not what we say we are, and not what others say we are, but the fruit is the evidence of what God is doing in and through our lives which comes and speaks to the world.

One of the characteristics that God has put within my heart - and it was like this for years - is that I am single minded about the vision of Heart of England Outreach. It's a consuming thing. It's in me twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and my whole life is focused on it. Often this can be an annoyance to people who always say I'm too single minded and that I don't think of anything else. Sometimes this cuts across my relationships with other people and has been a hindrance at times. Even today with Pam, she will often say, "Do you never stop thinking about Heart of England Outreach? Do you never have a day off? Do you never stop working?" This has been a strong feature over the years. It has been a hard price to pay. Even now with Meriden and the new Centre of England Community Church, it has been hard. There have been battles. There has been a price to pay. As always with God's work, to see His purposes established in this earth someone is asked to pay the price.

When God turned my life upside down on March 14 1979, He did something which was radical and deep. He put something within me which has been with there ever since. It's a deep sense of the power and presence of God, the Holy Spirit deep within my being that gives me the strength, the encouragement, and the ability to keep pressing on. A pioneer often has to work alone and with very little support. I'm able to do that because it's in my personality. Unless we're completely in the place where God wants us, and where He is able to have full control over our lives, then we will never know the true potential of what God wants to do in us. There is no substitute for knowing who we are in Christ, what our gifts and calling are, and to be able to function with fulfilment and purpose no matter what the devil throws at us. I've experienced a lot of that, a lot of indifference, a lot of being misunderstood, of people wanting to know what church or denomination I belong to. It seems that unless you are a part of a denomination or recognised ministry of a church then you are not kosher. But God has brought me through all that, and the fruit of what has been produced has spoken volumes. God

has confirmed His calling on my life. It is to pioneer. What God has put in my heart is to be an encouragement to others.

It's worth mentioning at this stage that I've never had any salary since I began almost twenty-five years ago. Somehow God has kept me. It has been difficult at times to pay bills and to make ends meet. I have had to struggle, and breakthrough, to trust God to meet my every need.

Never on any of our headed paper have I sent out requests for finance. I've never sent out appeals for money. Yet over the years God has established different ministries and projects through this work and has kept me on the road. The way that God has supplied my needs over the years, and for me to write about it may help other people. God seems to bring me into contact with individuals from time to time who know that God is asking them to help the ministry. This has happened time and time again, when certain individuals have helped to clear debts, or to provide finance in some other way to help me continue with the work. It's only by the grace of God that I've been able to continue these twenty-five years. God seems to guide me through the maze all the time. It's almost like walking through a dark jungle and seeing some glimmer of light through the darkness.

Chapter Six

PAM

It was at the beginning of 1994 that an invitation came to go to India. At that time the resources we had were very little, and I had very little support. When the offer for India came in I was faced with the challenge of deciding if I should go or not. I came to the conclusion that the Lord was challenging me to trust Him to go and take Him seriously. Preparations were put into place to go to Andhra Pradesh, India. It became evident that God was showing me that I should ask Nicky Wyndow to go with me.

God will always provide the means for what He wants us to do. He will pay for what He orders. It is exciting walking in the will of God as He is always doing something new. When God leads us into new areas, it is a time of testing and stretching. We have to get to the place where we are able to say, “Not my will but your will be done in my life”. If we are going to make any progress in the Christian life then we have to come to the place of denying ourselves. God knows what is best for us and all things will work together for good (Romans 8:28). God will bless us in ways we never thought possible, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). Good medicine is hard to swallow. Sometimes it can taste horrible, but it will do you good. We think we know best but we don’t. Haven’t we blown it often enough? A problem in the world today is that we think we can manage without God. When I was young, just after the war, almost everybody seemed to attend church on Sunday mornings. I believe it was because the country was so grateful to God for bringing them through two World Wars. The attitude

now seems to be that church is something we used to do in the old days. In this so called post-modern society it seems we don't need God or the church any more. "He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered." (Proverbs 28:25)

In August 1994 I was in Cumbria having a break at the Christian teaching centre. This was run by Derek Cook, who I'd had involvement with when I was living in Preston. Often Derek would allow me to go up to Cumbria and have a weekend break, and it was while I was there on this occasion that three people came into the place, for bed and breakfast, on their way up to Scotland. This was the first time I met Pam. She was taking her son, Jeremy, with her friend Val up to Scotland, where he was going to start his new job as a chef at Gleneagles. We briefly met over the breakfast table. I was instantly struck with her and I knew that somehow God was involved in it. After breakfast they left and went on their way to Scotland. I was speaking to some folks at the centre who told me that Pam had been to India and they asked if I had been able to speak to her about her time there. Shortly after this I got hold of her phone number. What really impressed me was that she was from the Isle of Wight, as I'd never been there myself. I actually wanted to get in touch with her again because I felt the Lord was leading me to do so.

When I came back to my home in Coventry, I gave her time to come back from Scotland, and then gave her a call. I said that I had heard that she'd been to India, and she then asked me where I was going. I told her about the proposed trip to Tenali in Andhra Pradesh. She said that it was the very place she'd been to the previous time that she'd visited. I arranged to go down to the Isle of Wight where we met and talked. She began to help me put together a lot of things that would help us on the trip. She actually drew up a list of dos and don'ts that we needed to consider.

After returning from India my relationship with Pam grew,

and we felt that God was bringing us together. We planned to marry on the Isle of Wight. Our wedding took place on a lovely sunny morning on the 9th September 1995. We had support from Norman Vesey and the Living Waters Fellowship of which Pam was attending at the time. We had a tremendous wedding in the centre of Shanklin, where people who knew Pam from all around the Isle of Wight gathered together with friends and relations. It was a wonderful experience. We then went to a Guest House in Niton, which friends of Pam ran. Alistair and Margaret were our hosts, ensuring that the day went well. Pam's son, Jeremy, did a wonderful buffet at the reception for us, and all in all it was a tremendous wedding weekend. Pam's daughter, Joanne, and son in law Brian, were very loving and supportive throughout. Joanne was the matron of honour at her mum's wedding. We went back up to Cumbria, where we had first met, for our honeymoon. It was just a thrill to know we were in the will of God, and we were setting off on a new venture. Pam was going to give up everything on the Isle of Wight and move up to Meriden in the Midlands to join me in my vision for the Heart of England.



John and Pam together.



Top three photos:
Rob Wright at an
outreach meeting, 1982;
Outside the Christian
Care Centre, Coventry.



Bottom three photos from left: Muriel Davenport;
Keith Dorey operating the 16mm projector;
Evelyn Gibson, John's first secretary.



Top to bottom:
Nicky Wyndow:
John with a young
man, Gavin at the
Youth Centre, Tile Hill,
Coventry;
John in 1985;
John and Pam on
their engagement, and
about to leave for their
honeymoon.

Centre photo:
 The Cross on the Green,
 Meriden, marking the
 centre of England (the shop
 can be seen far left just
 behind the white van)
 Top to bottom:
 John's 60th birthday;
 The Manor Hotel (where
 the Church meets);
 Pam outside the shop;
 A recent photo of John and
 Pam; One of the prayer
 walks led by David Butler.



Chapter Seven

INDIA

Returning to the beginning of 1995, Nicky Wyndow and I set off on the trip to India which was for about ten days. The brief was to go to Tenali, which was a very rural area in Andhra Pradesh, to a mission centre. There was a group running a ministry called 'Rural Evangelism'. We were going to speak to a group of pastors for a week, and also to do some evangelistic outreach in local villages. I remember flying from Heathrow airport to Bombay, and then to Hyderabad where we were met at two o'clock in the morning by a gentleman with a car. It was quite an eye opener when we got to Hyderabad. Hundreds of youngsters were waiting for the planes coming in. They were just waiting to beg from people who were coming off the planes. It was quite an awesome thing to have to walk through them with your luggage, and then to escape the pressures of all the needs around you at that airport. The car journey then took about ten hours.

We arrived at Tenali exhausted, but had a tremendous welcome. The mission centre was a school full of orphaned children. They were 'untouchable children'. They had been brought off the streets to the centre, where they were taught about Christianity and other things. Our hosts took us to a room in the centre, which we found out later was someone's bedroom they'd given over to us to stay in for our period of the visit. The first thing they said to us was, "Would you like a bath?" Of course my answer was, "Yes please!" We were then shown a little cubicle which was an extension of the room. There was a hand pump in the middle of the little cubicle type room which pumped water up from the ground somewhere. You then had to put the water into a bucket.

Once it was in the bucket you ladled it over yourself, and that was the bath! The toilet was a hole in the ground in the same room. It was all very sparse, very basic, and quite a challenge to us.

Nicky at this stage was beginning to suffer from jet lag, and did so for the first daunting few days. We discovered after a while that we were the only white people in the area, quite an experience! We were never allowed out of the camp without an escort. We could have been in danger if we had wandered off on our own. The food which they cooked was truly Indian in style and we just couldn't cope with the quantities of it. If we left food they would say, "You not eat your food, brother? You not hungry, brother?" It was just difficult to tell them that we couldn't eat it all. It was quite a problem trying to explain to them that we didn't need quite so much food. They actually appointed a servant girl to wait on us for our stay there. It was quite humbling really, to have this girl fetching and carrying food for us, which she did quite willingly.

During that trip we did see the blessing and the anointing of the Lord. A lot of the Pastors that attended our conference had walked miles to actually get to the mission centre.

On the mission nights we were ferried out to various villages where I was able to preach the gospel, and saw many respond in a way which was quite surprising at the time. The way that they were just responding to spiritual things was startling. There was a great hunger and an eagerness to respond to the word of God. It was tremendously encouraging and refreshing for us to see.

One of the big mistakes that we made was not to take mosquito nets with us, and by the end of the week we were just absolutely covered with bites all over. By the time that we were taken back to Hyderabad we were completely exhausted. However we experienced something that I would never have wanted to miss. It was a very fruitful time. We learned a lot and felt that we'd been obedient to what God had asked us to do.

Chapter Eight

BUILDING TOGETHER

I have a lot of love and admiration for Pam. She left everything on the Isle of Wight, including family and friends, and came to the Midlands where the only person she knew was me! She did not even know her way around!

After the wedding we had a lovely honeymoon in Cumbria, where we had first met. The Lord gave us a home in Fillongley, although we had tried to find a home in Meriden. At Fillongley we embarked together on a ministry in the Heart of England. We started to focus on prayer and intercession, and this was where Pam's help really came in. Life took on a new dimension as Pam contributed her unique gifts that are different to my own.

I still ran the 'Community Care Centre' in Tile Hill and Pam worked in there for a while. One night she was involved in a nasty car accident, which should have killed her. I was convinced this was the work of the devil, and it did not help Pam settle into living and ministering in the Midlands. Eventually we gave up working in the Care Centre and gave it over to the local churches to run. It is still there today. We felt it right to concentrate on Meriden.

Pam started to train people in prayer and intercession and ran a course for a group of people on this subject. This group prayed for Meriden and the central area. This interested Pam and she researched into the past, which helped us to pray and intercede with some understanding of what we were asking for, and also what we were up against. As a result of this, we felt it right to do

prayer walks through and around Meriden. We began to think about the possibility of having premises in Meriden where we could base the ministry itself.

When we were out prayer walking one night, we came to the Green, and we were asking the Lord for a shop or centre that we could use for the ministry. Previously on two separate occasions, Pam had found a small coin and had put them on the doorstep of a shop called 'Options'. The following morning a friend called and asked if we had seen the notice in the shop window. We immediately made contact with the person who was selling the lease and started negotiations. It was quite a difficult period as we had to find the money to buy the lease, and a solicitor had to be involved. Finally in December 1996 we were given the keys for the shop, and at the beginning of 1997 Pam opened the shop with a team of enthusiastic volunteers.

The shop has gone from strength to strength. There has been a lot of goodwill built up among the people in the village, including the local school, police constable, councillors and the parish council. All recognise that the shop (now called 'The Centre') is doing a lot of good work in the village, and people seem to recognise it as 'their' establishment. Pam not only works in the shop but she uses her gifts to talk to people, help them and pray with them.

Around this period of time we also made contact with 'Christian Life Ministries' in Coventry. As result of this, Tony Williams came along and became a Trustee of the Charity. He helped in the practical development of the shop.

In the autumn of 1997 we felt God telling us to focus on pioneering a Church which would be Spirit-filled. This indeed was part of the vision the Lord had given me before. We wanted to see God's kingdom established in Meriden. We started with portacabins in the local school in September 1997 and met on Sunday afternoon, sometimes with only two or three people

plus Pam and myself. At the same time, in the School itself, we started monthly prayer and praise meetings. After a while the new Church began to meet in the Community Centre, which is in the centre of Meriden. All our meetings were held there.

At the beginning of 2000 a room in the Manor Hotel became available, and we became 'The Centre of England Community Church'. We were given the use of a much bigger room in the Hotel, where we could hold monthly praise meetings. These became focused on 'Revival in the Heart of England'. We now have a weekly meeting for the Church and a bimonthly meeting, both held in the Manor Hotel.

At the beginning of 1998 Pam and I moved from Fillongley to a cottage in Meriden, situated at the back of 'The Centre'. We were there for two years and this helped us become established in Meriden.

At the end of 1999 the Lord provided, in a very miraculous way, the mobile home in which we now live. This belongs to us. It is in a beautiful spot in a rural green belt not far from Meriden.

It has been a long journey, but things are beginning to be fulfilled from the vision I first had in 1979, and there are so many more good things to come!

At the beginning of 2000 our main prayer request was for a group of twelve people that would form a core group who we could really move forward together with. Less than twelve months on God had answered this prayer in a mighty way.

We have been greatly blessed by the quality of teaching and worship leaders that we have had from week to week. We are thrilled at the prospect that within the next year or so we will probably need a larger room!

The work in the school has been running now for about three

years. With a couple of ladies helping Pam, and input from others from time to time, they run the work amongst the children. We have had tremendous support from the school and we have been given a classroom with a piano. The numbers of children attending are up and down, but there is a regular core group and interest of the children has been maintained. The group, called 'Dynamite', meet during school term.

At the 'Focus on Revival' meetings we have had speakers including George Ridley, David Carr and Don Double. The vision for this is to see Churches come together to pray and praise the Lord right in the centre of England, Meriden.

It has taken twenty years for the vision to begin to unfold, but now I feel I am beginning to come to the heart of what God has wanted me to do. I have faced a lot of apathy and opposition to the work, but at last there seems to be a real breakthrough and people are coming on board. The journey continues and I am determined, with the strength and help of the Lord, to finish the course.

Without Pam the last six or seven years could not have happened. When she came along, she brought much more to my life than I could have imagined. With Pam and the Lord, the work has been established. Pam has so many qualities and she can relate to people in a way that I cannot. Together we are unstoppable. As the Scriptures says in Ecclesiastes 4:12, "A threefold cord is not easily broken". Looking back I do not know how I managed without her.

The main impact of Pam's involvement in the ministry was the concept of intercessory prayer. That was one of her giftings and she had a longing to help people develop prayer and intercession within the Meriden area. She began to do a lot of research into the past, looking at how things had been affecting the area spiritually over the years. By looking at ley-lines and ancient paths from the past we started to compile a picture of what we

were up against in the centre of England spiritually. She was, in fact, a member of the Lydia prayer fellowship at the time, and so she made contact with the local Lydia group. It wasn't too long, probably late autumn to early December of 1995, that we went to a meeting at Queens Road Baptist Church in Coventry, where there was a united churches meeting convened by a man called David Butler. Immediately Pam was taken with this man David. She thought he was a man of God and she was picking up a good witness from him. She was very impressed with him and felt that somehow God wanted her to talk to him. David was a man who I'd had a little bit of contact with in the past with some of our work in Coventry. It wasn't too long before I met David again in Coventry, and we arranged to have a get together. It was very clear that David had a vision for the Heart of England and a desire to want to see God doing something in the centre of the nation.

I'd been praying and thinking about the Manor Hotel for a long time, and I wanted to talk with the manager about the possibility of having a room there. The manager of the Hotel was very open, friendly and welcoming. He showed me around the Hotel, and the outcome of the meeting was that we were going to begin to hold our meetings in the Manor Hotel on the 9th January 2000. It was a very positive step, and the room that he offered to us was just ideal to start with. It was the opening of a door for which we praised the Lord. We have actually been in the Manor Hotel now for four years. From the beginning our desire was not to compromise the full gospel in the power of the Spirit, and to encourage a Spirit-filled worshipping community where we would pray for the sick. We would just move into all that God wanted to do amongst us.

For the first year we found it very frustrating. We didn't know who was coming to be with us, or who was standing with us. We had contact with several people to begin with as individuals came along to the meetings and started to attend regularly. However none of it seemed to be working out. We didn't feel

that we had the right people. God just never confirmed what He wanted to do and we just pressed on. We believed that somehow God would eventually put together the group which He wanted to bring together. He started to do this, and it's quite noticeable that most of the people that God has brought to us (including through the work of the shop) are people who have come from a very hurting background. They are people that have been discouraged and who have been mentally and physically scarred in different ways. The ministry has been quite unique, a sort of sensitive specialised work, and we've had to go along with what God is doing. You can't manufacture how God wants to do things. You can't exclude certain individuals and choose others to start a church. It just doesn't happen like that. At the time of writing this book the people that we have coming to the fellowship are basically people that live in the Meriden area. A good number of those are people that Pam has made contact with through the work at 'The Centre'.

To date we have run five Alpha courses. The Alpha course is something which I personally feel is suited for what we're doing in Meriden. It's a course which is easy to present and helps to put across basic Bible truths in a simple way. God has used it in Meriden for us to be able to pioneer the church. The people who have come into the church have first made contact with the shop, and then decided to come on an Alpha course. Included with the Alpha course is a Friday morning fellowship. It is for people who have been on the Alpha course and want more fellowship, more growth and development. We have also run a Tuesday evening Bible study in the local village hall, and endeavoured to encourage the new Christians to find their spiritual feet and begin to grow in the ways of God. We're thrilled to be a part of what God is doing in the Heart of England. As this develops we will begin to reach out to other villages and beyond with the gospel.

At the beginning of 1998 the cottage at the back of the shop was offered to us. We had been praying about moving from

Fillongley to live there. We felt that God wanted us to do that in order to establish a spiritual beachhead. Pam felt that she could do more with the people in the village if she was living there, and so in the beginning of 1998 we moved into the cottage. We were there for approximately two years, and in those two years it was a very fierce spiritual battle which brought problems all around us. In particular we had problems on the front of the green with vandalism. Then somehow it stopped. God does things in an amazing way.

There were a couple of folk who used to come into the shop who had drink problems. Pam had befriended certain people, and she would never look down or make these people feel less than ourselves. She would always be available to talk to them. There was one particular gentleman I began to befriend. I went to visit him to show that we loved him, and to show him the love of God. His health declined because of the cancer he had, and eventually he died. He was one of the characters in the village that frequented the local club where a lot of drinking went on, and where the locals congregated quite a lot. I was approached to take this man's funeral. The person who was organising the funeral knew that there was no money available for it, and so I offered to do the funeral with no charges. It was just a way of showing our love in the community, a way of bridge building. After that the attitude in the village changed towards us. It was like a breakthrough happened. We began to gain a lot of respect, and that process has increased ever since. More people have come into the shop. People who would never have come near a church have approached us. They ask for Pam, and have poured out their problems to her. There are even people who come into Meriden from the surrounding area. The gratitude from the locals towards the work in the shop has just built up. By moving us into the cottage, God used us to establish the spiritual beachhead of the community, and now the work is established to a major degree. The villagers actually feel that it's their shop and it's their centre. We're just there to serve them.

During those two years many contacts were made in Solihull, Birmingham, Coventry and the surrounding area. From time to time I would arrange large meetings in the Manor Hotel to express unity, bringing Christians together to worship and pray here in the centre of England. The whole profile of what we were doing, and of what God was doing, was being raised all the time.

Towards the end of 1999 Pam's mother died. This meant that Pam had a proportion of the inheritance. We didn't particularly feel that we wanted to continue paying rent on a lease, and if we had continued to do so the money that Pam had inherited would soon have gone down the drain. Pam came home one evening and relayed how while looking on the notice board in one of the shops in the village, she'd seen an advert for a mobile home for sale in a rural area. We decided to enquire, and discovered that the mobile home was in a lovely spot between Meriden and Coventry. It was ideally placed for where we wanted to be. It was a place where we could retreat to, rest, and recharge our batteries. We both felt that God was opening something up to bless us, to have our own home and our own place. God just provided in a wonderful way the home where we now live, at Harvest Hill, near Allesley and Meriden.

At one of Heart of England Outreach's annual celebration meetings in Meriden, four years ago from the time of writing, we met Brian Atkins, the leader of Sheldon Christian Fellowship in Birmingham. It was a meeting where I'd given my vision of what God was calling us to do in the Heart of England. Brian approached me afterwards, and said that their vision was very similar to ours. The Lord had brought us together, and since then we have begun to work together. In fact the church at Sheldon was a pioneer work at the time. It had grown significantly and was becoming affiliated to the Assemblies of God. They wanted to link in with us, give us support and covering, and help wherever they could in Meriden. Brian has now been appointed the chairman of Heart of England Outreach. We're praising God for bringing us into contact.

Towards the end of 1999 I had a major battle on my hands personally because I started to pass blood one night. After going to the doctor for a check, I was sent to a specialist who eventually diagnosed my problem as being a tumour in my lower bowel. It was going to be a major thing and I had to have surgery to have the tumour removed. Just before Christmas, before we moved into the mobile home, I went into hospital. After the surgery the tumour was sent to the laboratories and the results showed that it wasn't cancerous. The operation was a complete success. The Lord had brought me through this challenging time. Pam was left on her own to run the shop, on top of having to come and visit me and keep everything moving. Through that battle I learned quite a lot about what God wanted to do in my heart and my life. I am now able to empathise with people who are going through similar situations. God really did something deep within me that has softened me up to be able to understand. It brings one to the place where we begin to realise that we're not immortal, and life is very fragile. It's important that we maintain a close walk with the Lord and keep short accounts, so that whenever God calls us we're ready and able to go into His presence.



John and Pam in the The Centre shop, Meriden

Chapter Nine

PRESSING ON

I'd like to talk now about how my twenty-five years of work or ministry has changed and developed. When I first began my desire was to set up meetings wherever I could to preach the gospel and bring people to Christ. Over the years God has begun to mould me so that now the emphasis is more on kingdom building. In the early days some of the work that I became immediately involved with acted as a catalyst, sparking off the founding of the Coventry City Mission and my involvement with a counselling centre during my time in Preston. I also brought Norah Cogen, who was the founder of the Message Telephone Ministry, to Preston. Some of these things have actually gone on and developed in other ways, although for one reason or another I have not continued to be involved with them. At the time that all of this was happening I was confused as to why it should be like that. But looking back over the years I can see that a major part of the gifting that God has given me is to be a catalyst, to get things started, to see what God is wanting to do, and then knowing when to let it go so others can get involved. It's that pioneering, apostolic concept to the ministry of Heart of England Outreach which has slowly unfolded. It has taken years to understand what God had been trying to do with me. I think that for all of us our walk with the Lord is an unfolding process. We open up something which God has put in our lives, which He will develop as we continue to walk in faith. There are times when we can't work out why everything seems to go wrong. There are frustrating times when doors seem to be shut for no apparent reason. There are people that come into our lives only for a season. When they come into our lives we feel that God

is going to do something long term, but eventually people will move on, and it can be very upsetting and hard to cope with at the time. However it's all in God's plan and God is always moving us forward into new things. We should be open and listening to God. Being humble enough to say, "Lord, yes, I understand what You're saying, and You're wanting me to let go of certain things and to move forward." It takes years sometimes, to begin to grow into a more assured process of ministry with what we can cope with. In other words to know the boundaries, to stop within them, to be effective in what God is calling us to be. With Heart of England Outreach there is more and more pioneering, growth and development taking place.

God has put the gift within my life to be an encouragement to individuals. I'll never understand why God brings to me people with an academic background, who have often been to university, and who need encouragement in one form or another. My background is just the opposite. But there is a strong desire within me to want to encourage certain individuals to keep going for God. God has put a longing in me to see them finding their place in what God wants them to be. It isn't a general thing, it's only certain individuals that God brings across my path, or puts upon my heart that I feel able to minister to in that way. There is a deep desire and longing to see younger men coming into what God has got for them. Certainly Pam and I are very different. My background enables me to be somebody who is always pushing people to move further on, encouraging people and putting people in at the deep end. All they can ever do once they're in the deep end is sink or swim, and I want to encourage people to move out of where they are and into where God wants them to be. Pam is probably just the opposite and has got more of a pastoral heart. She has got a loving nature and will listen, and listen, and listen, to support people in that kind of way. We are completely different and people see that. God knew what he was doing when He put us together, because the things that she can do I can't do, and the things that I can do she can't do. In many ways I've had to almost wait for Pam before being able

to move into the development of the vision of Heart of England Outreach.

I don't know how much further God wants me to go with the unfolding of the vision of Heart of England Outreach and our involvement with the Church in Meriden. My heart's desire is to see younger folks coming to the fore and to be helping with the work. As long as God keeps opening doors and bringing fresh opportunities I will keep going. We will always go forward into new opportunities that God is presenting to us, although we do need more help. We do want to see the work growing and don't want it to fizzle out as we get older. We want to see the vision expanding, to see something established in the centre of England and other opportunities opened up.

At the time of writing, one of the major things that God has done is give us back the cottage at the back of the 'The Centre'. The people who lived in there have moved out, and we are delighted and praising God. We needed more room to do what we feel needs to be done on the Green, at Meriden. The problem with 'The Centre' was that it wasn't quite big enough. It had occurred to us that if we could make a door between the shop into the cottage at the back, we would have a large room and a kitchen at the back, where we could do much more to develop the work. We could hold prayer meetings in there, Bible studies, Alpha courses, and possibly have tea and cakes available. On publishing this book it has now come to pass.

One of the things I feel God has challenged me with is to initiate a 'Meriden Festival', a celebration of all that is good within the Heart of England. Something which will bring key people together to form a committee and organise events within Meriden and the surrounding villages within the heart of England. At the time of writing key people are already coming together. The Solihull Council, the Parish Council, the Church leaders, the Police and other bodies will eventually form the committee. There is a lot of excitement about the potential of this from our point of view

at 'The Centre', and also from the other churches. It gives us unity with the churches. The church in Meriden will be given an upfront profile within the development of the community, and all that God may want to do there. We are excited about this and it's potential. It will give us much credibility, and can only be for the good. Something like this can spark a move of God in so many different ways. It will bring the schools and other different groups together. We're excited about the future; we want to move on with God. Again at the time of writing there is a sense that God is doing a new thing, and we're looking forward with faith, to see more people coming to faith in Christ.

The future looks wonderful. It's so thrilling after all these years of struggle that finally, something is beginning to break, and that the vision of what God wants to do in the centre of our nation is beginning to unfold. This isn't the end by any means; it's really just the beginning. "If God be for us, who can be against us." "Whatever God will order He will pay for." "Whatever God has said He will do, He will do!" So praise God, the best is yet to come!



Outside The Centre, Meriden celebrating 25 years of Heart of England Outreach

Chapter Ten

EBENEZER OPERATION EXODUS

January 1997 had seen the opening of 'The Centre' in Meriden. Any aid accumulated in the shop was taken to Bournemouth for Operation Exodus. Ebenezer Operation Exodus is a ministry facilitating aliyah, the return of the Jews to their homeland according to Ezekiel 36. It was founded in 1991 by Gustav Scheller while he was in Jerusalem. While sheltering from scud missiles, during the war, God spoke to him, telling him that the time had come to begin bringing people back to Israel from the former Soviet Union.

Starting with three people, Ebenezer Operation Exodus has grown to the extent that there are now three hundred people on the team worldwide. Although the Head Office is in Bournemouth it has an International Board, with offices in the USA, UK, Switzerland, Germany and Israel. There is National Co-ordinators in twenty-five countries and many bases in the former Soviet Union. It has an International Development Team, an Advisory Council, a UK Development Trust and an Ebenezer UK humanitarian Aid Trust. Ebenezer Operation Exodus is a ministry of intercession of a prophetic task and to date has helped 120 - 150,000 people go back to their homeland in response to Isaiah 49:22.

Right from the beginning of Ebenezer Operation Exodus, Pam's Pastor on the Isle of Wight supported the ministry. When God brought us together and she came to the Midlands, she began to talk to me about Operation Exodus. At that stage I hadn't heard of the ministry before, but was willing for aid to go to

Bournemouth. We were working together for the development of work in Meriden and also supporting a Jewish ministry.

On one occasion when Pam and I were taking aid down to Bournemouth we met John and Mary Wartnaby. The couple worked with the humanitarian aid at the base in Bournemouth and we became friends. Prior to retiring John had been a dentist in Coventry before moving to Bournemouth. The Dental Surgery he started in Coventry is the Dental Surgery Pam and I attend now! This was almost a divine contact and they told the folks in Bournemouth that they were expecting to see a lot more of us.

Shortly after this we started to receive phone calls from Deborah Minotti. At that time she was the Co-ordinator for the UK in the Bournemouth Office, but has since left to start the work in America. Deborah was enquiring to see if we would become more involved with Ebenezer, and to ask if there was any way in which we would like to help. She wouldn't give up easily and became quite persistent!

By now both Pam and I were very busy running the Outreach Centre in Meriden, and to be asked to take on more was something we just couldn't think about. Pam was Manager of the shop, a demanding role as she was there every day reaching out to people in the Meriden area and beyond. She was busy building bridges in the community and working with volunteers. The stock would come in through local people bringing bags of clothing and other things to sell.

I was working as a Director, and as well as running the Outreach Centre we were thinking of starting and pioneering a new church in Meriden. I was busy networking and talking with local churches to set up inter-church events within the village of Meriden. We were both just too busy to take on more.

However in 2005, while taking a van load of aid to Bournemouth, we were invited to have lunch with several of the trustees.

During lunch we were asked if we would be interested in taking on roles in Ebenezer within the Midland region. We were asked to be Representative and Prayer Leader respectively. Pam immediately felt that this was right, but only wanted to take the role on if God had spoken to me as well. I had a strong feeling that this was work from the Lord. I hadn't really considered the full implications of what I was letting myself in for but thought anywhere, anytime for Jesus. We stayed in Bournemouth that day and night. Deborah Minotti invited us back to the guesthouse where she was staying and showed us a DVD which she thought we would be interested in. 'A Banner for the Nation' completely overwhelmed us. Scriptures were coming forward from the DVD concerning the Jewish people and the aliyah, and one in particular spoke volumes to me. It was Ezekiel 34:16.

Ezekiel 34:16 was the scripture that God originally gave to me when I was first called to set up a ministry thirty years ago. It says, "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgement." Originally I believed God had given me the scripture to reach out to people and do evangelism. I would seek the lost sheep and bring back those who had been driven away. For twenty-five years I had been endeavouring to do evangelism with a vision for the Heart of England. The scripture had been in my heart but I did not understand the full measure of it. Looking back it is like God had been preparing me for twenty-five years, until I was ready for him to reveal the full truth of the scripture and its implications. We can never understand in our human thinking how God will do things. For me the scripture now showed a link between Israel and the aliyah, and the Heart of England. God had been establishing a centre in the Heart of England and preparing me in that. When I was ready, he had shown his involvement for me in the work of the aliyah and support for Israel within the Heart of England and beyond. The fulfilment of that vision I had now includes working out from the centre of England with Ebenezer and with the Jewish

work, to areas throughout the UK and beyond.

Having accepted Ebenezer's invitation, Pam and I began to wonder how God would combine Heart of England Outreach, the charity work and 'The Centre', with our involvement in Ebenezer, in terms of setting up prayer groups and promoting the work of Operation Exodus in the Central region.

After many years of being in the wilderness it had been quite a strong release to come into this new understanding. People began telling me that this was a high calling and I was excited about the new possibilities, even though it was a demanding thing to become involved with. Almost immediately in the pioneer church we had resources available on the book table, and every week we encouraged people to take the literature. However as we introduced Operation Exodus people began to wonder what we had got involved in.

It became quite noticeable from the response that people began to think that we had gone off track. On one occasion I was warned by a colleague not to get side tracked from the vision God had given me. The involvement with the Jewish people and Israel meant that colleagues were giving us the cold shoulder. They just couldn't understand the significance of this.

Over the last forty years I have endeavoured to follow God's plan and walk with Him to the best of my ability. I knew God had spoken to me and I knew I was on the right track. God doesn't make mistakes and when we trust Him He will unfold His perfect plan for us. I was prepared to continue to follow God's plan. God would work out all the obstacles, unfold His plans and purpose for the Heart of England Outreach and the involvement with Ebenezer Operation Exodus.

When getting started with Ebenezer, the first thing I thought about was how I could combine networking and development work with Ebenezer in the Central Region; as well as develop Heart of England Outreach, the Church and the work at 'The Centre'.

Firstly I got a complete list of all the contacts within the region. The region was as far north as Shropshire, south to Warwickshire, west to the Welsh borders and Herefordshire, and east over towards the Leicestershire and Derby areas. Having accumulated the contact list I began to pray, and decided that the best approach would be to write a letter introducing myself and send it out to all known contacts. I then phoned individuals to introduce myself, and talk to them about the importance of what God is doing now in the UK and worldwide in connection with the Jewish people. I spoke about our responsibility to them, and explained how this is a cutting edge ministry which is right on what God is doing now in fulfilment of scripture.

The Manor Hotel in Meriden had been the location for the Sunday Fellowship group for years, and I had been plugging away with the work that was going on there and praying that God would bring in more people. That had been the focus for about six years. Now God had moved us up a stage and we began thinking about Ebenezer as well within the Central Region. We felt that it was right to hold a meeting for Ebenezer in the Manor Hotel and invited people to come along.

The first meeting in the Hotel for Ebenezer Operation Exodus was a complete success. The room was packed full of people, with a resource table and information set up. We had been praying for all these years for God to fill this Hotel room, and he did it in such a magnificent way. God is amazing in the way He works out His plans and purposes.

As a result of some of the phone calls I had made, I began to make good contacts with the church at Redditch, Evesham, and churches in the Birmingham area Kings Heath. Folk began to take an interest, and dates were put in my diary to go and meet these leaders and hold events at their Fellowships.

The next thing I began to focus on was the possibility of a Regional Prayer Meeting for Ebenezer in our centre. I felt that a monthly Regional Prayer Meeting might encourage those who

were isolated, who didn't get a lot of encouragement but were on the mailing list within the Central Region. A Regional Prayer Meeting was started, which in any month would have between fifteen and twenty people praying on the last Sunday of the month at 'The Centre' in Meriden.

Our next thoughts were beginning to focus on organising one day conferences to promote the work of Ebenezer. We wanted to get more people involved and to establish prayer groups. The first one day conference took place in March 2005 in Coventry. A large AOG Church was used in the centre of Coventry, and the first speaker was Fred Wright, along with Pam and myself. I spoke with Fred Wright after the event and aired my concerns, telling him how I was green at this, not sure of a lot of the teaching and I had never been to Israel. He assured me that if God had called me to it then He would equip me to do it. I felt very encouraged to carry on.

To date there have been at least six one day conferences within the Central Region in places such as Evesham, Redditch, Birmingham, Castle Bromwich, Coventry and Worcester.

God was beginning to show Pam and I how to combine the role of being a Regional Representative and Prayer Leader with Ebenezer in the Midland Region, and running 'The Centre' and Heart of England Outreach along with the Meriden Christian Fellowship at the same time.

Now we have the support of an international ministry combined with what we are doing in the Central Region. I have been able to start balancing work out between Ebenezer, working in the Central Region with the Church, 'The Centre', and various events as all one ministry. What we are doing in the Central Region with Ebenezer and Heart of England Outreach has all become one focus, one involvement, one ministry, and a fulfilment of what God originally called me to do.

The original ministry or vision was to set up a work in the centre of England and then to work out from the Central Region. From

the centre of the nation we would move into the Midlands and beyond – worldwide. This involvement with Ebenezer begins to fulfil that vision perfectly. Originally I had no idea that God was going to call me to work with Jewish people, and that this involvement would fulfil that original call and vision. Pam and I are excited about the future. We are excited about working together in the coming days and months, towards the end time within the work that God has called us to do. It is a battle with continuous spiritual attacks. However we are in the victory, we are in Christ, and we will fulfil His prophetic word.



John speaking at a Call to Prayer conference.



Pam teaching on prayer.



John speaking at an Ebenezer event.

Chapter Eleven

HANDING OVER

God has wonderful ways in bringing us to crossroads. He can redirect our focus and efforts, and begin to channel us in different directions. Before meeting Pam I had struggled for almost thirty years, and this had taken a toll on my health. It hadn't hindered me in doing what God had asked me to do, but there were times when I needed to rest, take time and have some space. In 2006 God brought this about in a way which made me stand down for a while. I began to assess all I was doing and how it was affecting us. It was a stopping point where God wanted to speak into our situation. Pam and I became aware that God was beginning to show us that it was time to be thinking about handing over the work at the shop and 'The Centre'. It was becoming quite demanding for Pam with a lot of lifting involved, the day to day work, and ministering. She would stop everything in 'The Centre' for anyone coming in who wanted to talk and pray. As well as this Pam had a deep desire in her heart to become more involved with intercession, to be free to travel and more focussed on prayer.

I was concerned that after all these years getting the ministry up and running and established, that it may cease to carry on. For all of the years I have been involved I have lived by faith, never had a salary and the work has never been directly funded from anywhere. God has nurtured it and brought it to the place where we were able to get something established in the centre of the nation. There have been individuals along the way who have contributed financially in difficult times, but apart from this we have pressed on in faith, believing God would fulfil his

purposes, believing that if God orders something then He will pay for it.

Throughout 2006 we were brought to the place where we focussed on praying and seeking the Lord for what He might be planning for the future.

At the same time we were beginning to feel more drawn into the work of Ebenezer. Things were beginning to happen in the Central Region, and we were starting to see God at work in the prayer groups and at the conferences.

At the beginning of March 2007 the lease for 'The Centre' was up for renewal and it seemed an obvious focus to be looking at. We were thinking about the possibility of standing down and handing the work over. It seemed impossible at this stage to think that this would happen and so we decided to put out a fleece. We asked the Lord that if he wanted to continue the work that someone would come along to take it over – if not then we were prepared to let it go. By committing it to God we laid everything out on the altar and trusted Him to work out all of the details.

If God had brought us to the end of that particular work, then we needed to start thinking about what to do with all the stock, furniture and various items left in 'The Centre' when we would let the lease go. We began the search for a depository where we could store things until such a time when God either moved us on or provided another facility for a base or store somewhere. I was able to find a depository near to Meriden for a reasonable price. Again this was a step of faith. We were prepared to let everything go if we knew that God was leading us out. We started to take things to the depository to see what God would do.

March 2007 saw the introduction of Kevin and Lynne Hunt. The couple came into 'The Centre' to enquire about an event which we were holding in Coventry for Ebenezer. Pam said that when they came over the threshold of the shop she had a witness in

her spirit that they were the couple they had been praying for to take over the running of the charity.

They were making enquiries regarding a leaflet they had been given about an event going on in Coventry with Ebenezer. They explained how they had been in Meriden for a week but hadn't really noticed 'The Centre'. When they came back they were quite surprised to see what was going on. God had brought Kevin and Lynne to us.

On the following Saturday at the meeting in Coventry for Ebenezer I spoke to Kevin and learned how he was coming out of employment. He felt that the Lord was now leading him into ministry. He was giving Pastoral oversight to a small group at a church in Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, but felt that God was directing him towards Meriden. He also said that he was interested in getting more involved with 'The Centre'.

When I shared this news with Pam she was overwhelmed and filled with joy. We praise the Lord for his intervention in that way to answer the prayers, for the fleece that was put out, and for the confirmation of what He was doing. We informed the trustees and came to an arrangement with Kevin and Lynne so that they could come into 'The Centre' to work and help, and to get to know the ropes.

It was at this time that the shop next door, which was being used as a florist, became available. Pam and I had been praying for this shop for years. We felt that God wanted us to have the full building in order to expand the work and do more within the village.

Pam had got the small shop up and running, and we had seen God use that to make inroads into the village and help us to build relationships. By giving us this extra space God had extended the tent pegs. We all got our hands dirty in starting to decorate and prepare the old florist shop for the charity work of the charity shop.

After all the years of struggles, disappointments, and battles I

had fought in trying to get this work up and running, to know that somebody had come along and actually wanted to take it over was overwhelming. Even better was that they felt God had called them to do this. It showed the people who had insulted and misunderstood the work that it wasn't just a one man-band ministry, but that God really was at work through the ministry. The ministry would carry on, yet Pam and I would be released to do more work with Ebenezer.

For the six years we were having meetings in the Manor Hotel in Meriden to start and develop Meriden Christian Fellowship, we saw God do a lot of work in the lives of individuals. For Kevin and Lynne and the group to be carrying on the work is very encouraging. We praise God for this.

The period of time for handing over was about six months. During this time it became increasingly difficult to let the work go and hand it over. It was particularly difficult for Pam because she had built up a substantial amount of goodwill in the village. She had become friendly with a number of people who would come into 'The Centre' on a daily basis. It didn't matter who came through, everything stopped to give them the attention they needed. God really used Pam to establish 'The Centre', and in the few years that Pam had been in Meriden she became very well known and respected in the village.

After thirty years of Heart of England Outreach, to suddenly have to hand it all over was quite a difficult thing to come to terms with. We were desperate to see the work carrying on, but at the same time we didn't find this period of letting go easy. Pam and I still remain as trustees of the charity.

God has His ways of testing us. I was prepared to let all of the work we had done go, but right at the eleventh hour God brought Kevin and Lynne along to take on the continuing work of the charity Heart of England Outreach. When God does something like this it opens people's eyes to see what He is doing. In many ways that is how He works in Israel. A small and insignificant

nation has been chosen by God to reveal himself to the world. It is through the insignificant things of the world that God often works to reveal Himself, His will, and His glory.



The Centre staff, Christmas dinner 2007.



Pam speaking at the Millenium Celebration on Meriden Green.



Meriden Cross marking the centre of England with The Centre in the background.

Chapter Twelve

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE JEWISH WORK

In the autumn of 2007 Pam and I attended the annual training weekend at Bawtry Conference Centre in Bawtry, South Yorkshire. Following a conversation with Russell Bowles, Pam was asked to take on the responsibility of National Prayer Co-ordinator for England. This took her by surprise and she was thrilled that it was part of what God was calling her to do. She had a deep desire for intercession, and is very gifted and anointed at being able to bring people into the presence of the Lord, speak on intercession, and encourage and teach others in the same.

Pam was thrown in at the deep end, and one of the problems she had was that she was completely computer illiterate. She was immediately thrown into the preparation of a Prayer Initiative which was being put together for 2008, and needed to get on the computer quickly and start corresponding. I had only been self-taught with the computer over a couple of years and did what I could to help her. We were able to get Pam a laptop, on which she progressed well and is improving all the time.

We have come to realise that when God calls someone into ministry He doesn't make mistakes. He chooses people who He knows will be able to cope with all that He is asking them to do. The main requirement is that if God is in the centre of what the person is doing then they can work together for good.

At the training weekend in Bawtry I also spoke with Russell Bowles. I was asked to take on the role of a Regional Advisor for Ebenezer UK (including Ireland). I was overwhelmed and

praise God for his faithfulness. God has been faithful to me over the years and has reversed all that the enemy has thrown at me. Many years ago after I had got started with the work of Heart of England Outreach, it was difficult to even hold meetings without people asking questions – “who is this John Yates?” and “what is Heart of England Outreach?”

God takes us through some testing times, and if we are faithful in small things then He will give us more to do. I am reminded of Luke 19:17, “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’”

For many years a lot of the pressures that Pam and I faced through ministry came from the enemy hitting us at our weakest points – the family. The last three years, however, have seen some wonderful things happen in our family. The birth of our grandchildren, Luke and Lewis, has put a sparkle into the eyes of Pam and encouraged her in many ways. We praise God for them. God is so faithful in the way he touches our lives and meets all of our needs. We have been able to draw back a little from ministry, allowing Pam to spend time with her daughter and son, Joanne and Jeremy. We have been able to focus more on the family who have been on the Isle of Wight while we have been in the Midlands.

The Lord gave me a scripture for 2008 which I was able to take with me on the various trips and tours in the course of the year. “See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it” (Revelation 3:8).

The beginning of the year saw Pam being thrust into her role within Ebenezer. I felt that part of my role was being a support to her, particularly with the preparation for a National Prayer Initiative that year. Doors were beginning to open, and it was quite amazing to see dates in my diary building up. The events of 2008 illustrate how the Lord has released us into this new phase of ministry. There was a wide open door to get on and

start to make contacts and developments in various regions and areas in the UK and Ireland.

The first event we did was on 5 January at Bournemouth. It was a seminar called 'A Call to Prayer'. Pam and I worked together, and Pam has put together a course book to enable those who are interested to gain more depth and understanding of intercession and prophetic prayer. We had been building up to the National Prayer Initiative with a lot of work and preparation. This culminated on 22 March. Then on 5 - 14 April I was able to go with Pam on an Irish tour. We flew to Dublin and then travelled to Wexford where we took meetings. From Wexford we went on to Limerick, again taking meetings, doing other research and prayer walking. From Limerick we travelled to Killarney South, where we were able to speak in several house groups and churches, again taking meetings and prayer walking. One particular event stands out when we were taken to the Kerry Ring, a place where there is a lot of history. We were able to pray and intercede in that area. We finished by taking a meeting in Cork before flying home. The first visit to Ireland was quite amazing because everywhere we went folk seemed eager to receive us. They wanted to be involved. They believed it was God's time for Ireland, and wanted us to come back and do a bigger event.

Almost immediately after returning from the Irish tour I was leaving again. From 17 - 30 April I went to the north of England and Scotland, visiting Cumbria, Isle of Bute, Saltcoats, Motherwell, north Berwick, Dundee and Aberdeen. I was meeting up with all the people we had contact with to visit, encourage, and open up new areas (particularly the area of Aberdeen). It was quite encouraging to see how the doors were opening, and to see the positive response to this message of the aliyah.

On 1 - 9 June we had a fantastic trip to Israel when we were invited to attend an International Conference for Ebenezer. I

was thrilled and encouraged to meet people from different countries who all shared the same ideas. It was a great blessing at the end of the conference to be able to stay for an extra few days in the Old City.

The other highlight of June 2008 was a conference held in Coventry. Pembrokeshire in Wales was the location of a one day conference on 12 July. A return tour to Scotland was arranged for 29 September - 7 October. We would build on the initial contact in Aberdeen, and also fly over to the Isle of Lewis. I found it very exciting and encouraging being in this place where revival had been in the past. Our hosts made us welcome and we hope to return to Lewis to build on that. From Lewis we had a one day conference in Aberdeen and then moved on to Edinburgh, where we had another pioneer event to open up doors and establish prayer groups.

The whole purpose of these tours, trips, and one day conferences is to try and envision the church to their responsibility to Israel. We want to encourage people to be part of a prayer group, and to pray for the Jewish people to return to their homeland. We hope to develop the work throughout the UK.

On 18 and 19 October I was privileged to go over to Wexford in Ireland to meet up with Shirley Lawrenson. Together we took a meeting in Wexford on the Sunday, and began to build on the initial visits I had made with Pam.

On 22 November we had the first one day conference on the Isle of Wight. We praise God that the conference was well attended, and are looking forward to the contacts and all that is going to come out of it.

2008 has been a tremendous year of opportunity. We give God praise and glory that we have been able to open new doors, and we look forward with anticipation to a productive 2009.

Chapter Thirteen

STEPPING STONES

The Bible says that, “He who calls you is faithful, He also will do it.” (1Thessalonians 5:24) I would like to bring out the reality of where I’ve come from, and the great impact or impression that is left on my life from my journey, particularly since God started to move in my life. It all began when I was just a small lad, when my father died. I thought that it was hopeless, that there wasn’t much future, and I did not know where I was going. Then God miraculously intervened. When I look back my life has been a tremendous testimony to the grace of God and what He can do in an individual’s life. I’m amazed even now at what I’ve actually been able to do. Looking back, one sees all the years and all the different stepping stones along the way. I can see how God has used every one, every situation, every circumstance and every difficulty to produce good out of it all. At times it almost seemed too painful and hard to bear, but God takes all that and produces something through His wonderful grace and love.

I just hope this book will help someone to believe that God can do the same with them. God is no respecter of persons. He’s looking for a heart that will be willing enough to trust and believe Him, to accomplish through Him what the Bible says He will do. God is faithful. When He begins to do something, He is utterly dependable. We can trust Him. He will finish what He begins. It won’t happen in the way that we want it to happen. It won’t happen in the time period that we think it should happen. But it will happen in God’s time. The key to it all is to believe by faith that God can, and will use you as an individual, because it is only faith that God speaks to. The problem is that in many

of our lives we're not willing to pay the price, and unbelief gets in the way. Once unbelief gets in the way it's difficult to believe God for what He wants to do. I want to encourage you to believe God, to believe the word of God, believe His promises for you. I want you to take hold of them and start to move in faith into what God is calling you to do. God has a plan for each one of our lives. "He is faithful, and He will bring it to pass."

Very early on, just after God turned my life upside down, I began to find my spiritual feet. I had a hunger to want to serve God, an eagerness to want to go on and start to find God's plan and purpose for my life. Very often the opportunity would be given to give testimony in the church, and I was very eager in those days to stand up and try and give testimony to what God was doing in my life. I was very shy at that time and felt very inadequate. I mumbled and couldn't quite coordinate my words and thinking. But on one particular occasion, I stood up not knowing what I was going to say. As I stood on my feet, something from the top of my head went right through me to the tips of my toes. An anointing came upon me. It passed down through my body and my whole being seemed to relax. There was something happening which gave me an assurance, an awareness to start to coordinate my thinking and my speaking. I found myself being able to just communicate what God was putting in my heart at the time. I believe that if I hadn't been willing to keep trying to witness, to share my story, then that probably would never have happened. I believe we've got to step out by faith. As we do this, God will meet us and honour our step of faith. The Holy Spirit will then start to move in our lives. It's rather like He gives us a bridge to step onto in faith. Then as we step forth the Holy Spirit begins to operate in our lives.

I mentioned earlier in this book of how I used to be out and about quite often visiting people. I would knock on doors to try to make contact and share my faith. I thank God for the various incidents that impressed upon me the importance and the reality of the spiritual battle that we are in. It was through those experiences

that God equipped me to be able to fight back, and continue to go on. The apostle Paul says that we're not fighting flesh and blood but spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12), and "To put on the full armour of God, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, having the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, the helmet of salvation and our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace". There are no short-cuts to what God wants to do in our lives. I want to encourage all that read this story to believe that God is faithful, and when we start to move out in faith He will move through each one of us. We will overcome our problems. We will accomplish that which He's calling us to do. We will fulfil His plan and purpose.

I want you to ask yourself three basic questions.

1. Where is the enemy operating in your life? Know where he is. You can't fight any battle, or any enemy, unless you know where he is.
2. Who is the enemy? What's his capability? What's his name? How does he attack you?
3. How do you fight him? If you know who he is, and where he is, you can then learn how to fight him.

If you ask these three basic questions, you're sure to be able to deal with the enemy and the problems you face in your life.

The Bible describes our service for God as a battle. It is also described as a spiritual conflict. For those who are endeavouring to walk away from their past life, it can be a spiritual battle - read Ephesians chapter 6. For those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, the outcome of this battle is already settled. When Jesus died on the cross, He openly defeated the power of the devil (the one we call the enemy and battle against). This was achieved by His substitutional death for mankind on the cross. His blood paid the price to satisfy God's perfect law, and His covenant with man. Jesus Christ gives us the armour to deal with the difficulties we face in this life. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"

(John 10:10). The spiritual conflicts we endure can be compared to a battle or a war here on this earth.

Finally, on this particular subject of displaying the triumphant life, Ephesians chapter 1 says that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. So then, we can display a triumphant, overcoming Christian life. If we're in Christ then we are in His victory. We are above the problems and not beneath them. We have been blessed in Christ and raised up with Him in the heavenly places. As we display the triumphant life, the resurrected life that Jesus brings us into, we make the devil tremble. If we will use the name of Jesus, then as the apostle Paul says, "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow", and the name of Jesus will set the enemy to flight. Use the name of Jesus! Finally, the blood pleads for us! "They overcame Him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." (Revelation 12:11) The blood of Jesus Christ gives us the victory.

In Philippians 3:1-14 we read of how the apostle Paul talks about forgetting the past and moving on towards the goal. In verses 8 and 9 we read these words, "Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." It's all about values, all about the right values in life. What about your values? What have you given up for Christ? Have you got your priorities right? Paul came from a very blessed background. His pedigree was impeccable. He was circumcised on the 8th day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law a Pharisee, verse 5. Pharisees were of a very devout Jewish sect. He had very impressive credentials that would have impressed any Jew. He says he counted it all loss to gain Christ. Then he says in verse 10 "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and

the sharing in His sufferings". He gave up everything to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Thinking about my background there was very little I had to give up. Because of the way that my life panned out, God brought me to the lowest place. He brought me right down to the gutter. When I was in the place of having been stripped of everything, the only way I could go was up, through committing my life to Christ and finding the truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life". He said, "The truth will set you free". For me it was finding the truth, starting to grow, following Christ and forgetting everything else. In my case I had a lot to forget, but very little to give up. What are you willing to give up in order to know Christ? To know Christ is to give up everything, to be totally sold out and available. Paul's purpose we read here in verse 12 "I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me". We shouldn't let anything take our eyes off the goal.

Going back to the early days, when I discovered in that little church at Willenhall that God had gifted me, I was like an athlete. I shot out of the starting blocks in a race and was just determined to go on and to follow Christ, to seek Him, to know what His purposes were for my life. "I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

People have often mentioned to me in the last twenty years that I don't stop in any one place very long. That is because I've been following where God has led me to. When I began in 1979 - 80, I was on a council estate in Coventry. God then moved me from there to the other side of the city. I then moved again after another couple of years to Preston. After five years the Lord moved me back to Coventry, on the south side of the city. Then from the north side of Coventry, marrying Pam, and moving further into the Heart of England, in Fillongley. I was then moved into Meriden itself. Shortly after that we went to the opposite side of the city. Each time God had a plan and a purpose

in moving me, because each time there was a work for me to do. In that work there was preparation for what God was doing in my life to bring the change. He was moulding me, developing my character, preparing me for what He had planned for me in the future.

Of course this is not the end of my journey. My journey will only be completed when I stand before my Maker at the throne of grace. I hope and trust that He will say, "Well done good and faithful servant". Maybe while you have been reading this book you have been challenged and moved by some of the happenings in my life. Perhaps you have never asked Jesus to come into your life. Perhaps you are a backslidden Christian. It would be wrong of me to end this book without giving you the opportunity to make your peace with God. By saying this simple prayer in childlike faith you too can experience the same joy, peace, and love, that salvation in Christ brings.

"Lord Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You came into the world to die for me on the cross. Come into my heart now and be my Lord and Saviour. Forgive me for my sins, and heal me. Thank You Lord Jesus, for saving me. Amen."

If you said this prayer with sincerity then you are a new creation in Christ. This is the best decision you could ever make in your life. God has no favourites. If He can do it for me, He can do it for you. All He is asking for is for you to surrender to Him, and you are on the road to a wonderful new life. God doesn't promise it will always be easy but you will have the assurance of spending eternity with Him. I have written this book to bring glory to His Name and to show what the Lord can do in a person's life. I am always willing to share my testimony wherever He may lead me to go.

Please make contact with a local church where they preach Christ. If you have just made a commitment to Christ I would love to hear from you. Please see page 3 for contact details.

Chapter Fourteen

THE ISLE OF WIGHT

It was in March 2009 that we began to think and pray about the possibility of moving nearer to Pam's children, and grandchildren on the Isle of Wight. The island was Pam's home and it was only natural that she should desire to be with her family, but for me it was a much bigger decision as I was leaving home territory in the Midlands.

As I considered the idea I realized that Pam had given up everything to leave the island fourteen years earlier to live with me when we got married, so it was right that I should seek God with an open mind in case the move was indeed of Him.

It wasn't too long before we felt a 'green light' from the Lord and put our home on the market. We then started to seek the Lord about how He would have us serve Him on the island.

The months rolled by without any interest from prospective buyers. In March 2010 there was a knock at the door and an elderly couple asked if they could have a look round. They seemed interested and after a second viewing, a short while later said they would indeed like to buy our home. However there was a problem; they had not yet put their property on the market!

As theirs was the only interest we'd had we didn't want to risk losing the sale, so we told them we would give them six months to find a buyer. In the meantime we told our excited family on the Isle of Wight that we expected to be moving in approximately six months. It also gave us time to go to the island to look for an affordable home, something we knew would take God's intervention as property on the island can be costly.

We drove down and spent a few days looking round. We found quite a nice place not far from where Pam was brought up. The

vendor however was on holiday. Pam warmed to it because of the memories it had for her, so we told the agent we were interested but would only be ready to move in six months time.

We returned to the Midlands and after a short while were contacted by our buyers. They had quite a shock for us. They had found a buyer for their house but the person needed to move in quickly hence they needed to move into ours in two weeks! Suddenly we were in a position of having to move out of our home and had no where to go! It was a stressful and testing time. However, I felt God was in it and recalled similar periods from my Christian life years ago when I had proved His faithfulness in times of difficulty

We contacted the agent of the property we were interested in on the island and although the vendor was still away, the agent felt sure things would be fine and we could move in while the legal work was completed.

The moving date was fixed for October 5th and our son Jeremy arranged, with one of his friends, to come up in a van and move our belongings down to the island. Some of our local friends offered to help load the van and another friend even came down from the north west of England to assist. We were very touched by this act of support.

The day before the move Jeremy contacted us to give us the news that he had broken his toe and wouldn't be able to come! This was a major setback but little did we realise it was only the beginning of a lengthy period of testing when I would question what the Lord was doing.

The day was saved by our son-in-law, Brian stepping in with his father. They drove the van up the next day and with our friends, packed everything as well as they could and moved us down to the island.

On arriving, our first port of call was the vendor's agent who, incredibly, after telling us to move down, informed us there was now a problem. It seemed that the owner of the mobile home park where our new property was located didn't want us to buy the home we were interested in. We were astonished! We thought everything was moving ahead smoothly.

We contacted the vendor's solicitor and he agreed that although for the time being we couldn't move in, we could at least unload our belongings and put them inside while this hiccup with the site management was sorted out. Thankfully, Jeremy offered to put us up at his apartment, otherwise we would have had no where to sleep!

The days rolled round and we heard nothing about the situation with the site management. One day however, something else occurred which seemed at first to bring confusion. A man from another mobile home park contacted us and asked if we were still looking for somewhere. He told us that he had a mobile home available on a very small park at Wooton Bridge. We agreed that we might as well go and look at it. There was nothing to be lost as our other situation seemed to be at stalemate.

At first we were not impressed. It was quite old and needed a lot of work to modernise it. However it was significantly bigger than our previous home. What should we do?

The answer seemed to come in a surprising way. It turned out that the site managers of the mobile home park where we had stored our furniture had been involved in some kind of criminal activity and our children didn't want us to move there under any circumstances.

After praying about this new property we felt that God was definitely leading us in this new direction, so we decided to put in an offer for it. Amazingly it was accepted.

We now had the problem of how to get all the work done so we could move in as soon as possible. God however provided for us. It turned out that this new site manager was a kitchen fitter and he offered to help us!

It seemed now that our problems were finally over. Alas it was not to be. The day we were due to sign the contract the unthinkable happened. The vendor suddenly died! It seemed incredible. What else could go wrong? We were told that the vendor's estate would need to go to probate and it would take about three months to complete!

We had put all our belongings in storage but now needed to rent somewhere to live for three months. We found a very nice

flat that was available to rent at the lower winter rate. It was a testing time as we pondered on further problems and wondered if this new contract would go through.

Four or five weeks later the solicitor dealing with the vendor's estate contacted us and said that after some consideration he felt that there shouldn't be any difficulty with the probate and it would be safe for us to sign the contract. We were so relieved! We signed and immediately began the modernisation necessary. Just before Christmas 2010 we finally moved in.

Two electricians fitted electric heaters for us but turned out to be con men so we lost some money and had to manage without hot water for some weeks until Kevin, the site manager, could correct their shoddy work. However this didn't shake us from the knowledge that we had bought the right home.

There was still quite a bit of work to be done. In my youth I had had some training as a painter and decorator so decided to do that myself while the site manager, Kevin, tackled the heavy work. Between us we made a big difference, transforming a rather sad, dowdy dwelling into a bright, airy new home.

At the back of the mobile was a lovely garden, with trees behind it providing privacy. It was beautiful place to pray. The Lord had indeed blessed us. It was April 2011 and we started to relax!

We had started worshipping at New Hope Christian Fellowship at Sandown. The pastor had been helping our son Jeremy with various things and I felt it was only right for us to join there and see what God would have us do in a supporting role.

We had been very active in the Midlands and both felt we should take things a bit slower. I had relinquished my national role with Ebenezer Operation Exodus and taken on responsibility for the Isle of Wight and Pam had resigned from her role as Ebenezer Prayer Co-ordinator for England. It was time for something new.

The pastor at New Hope Fellowship agreed to us holding a one-day conference for Ebenezer and this proved to be well-attended by people from all over the island. He also began to invite me to preach from time to time and in 2012 supported

Pam in holding her 'Call to Prayer' seminar at the church. This too was a blessing. We really began to feel part of the fellowship and since then our involvement has grown.

If I am honest there have been times when I have questioned why the Lord wants me on the island but in my heart I know that I finished what He called me to do in the Heart of England and that it was right to move into a new chapter of my life with Pam.

Life on the island is quite different from the mainland. The island seems to be about twenty years behind the rest of the country in some ways. It's difficult to explain this but the lifestyle is typical of an island – cut off and laid back. Even though the distance from the mainland is only short there is a definite feeling that one is removed from the frenetic hustle and bustle of 21st century Britain. The other side of the coin though is that people can be unaware of the urgency of the times we are living in.

This has become our challenge, to bring revelation and understanding of what the Lord is doing prophetically in these last days, especially concerning Israel, to be a voice in the 'wilderness' so to speak. Our hearts' desire is for the church to lay down its own agendas and embrace God's end-time plans. Jeremiah 23 and verse 29 says, 'Is not My word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? (NASB)

Praise God for the faithfulness of His word that it will accomplish what it is sent to do and not return void. Amen!



The Needles, Isle of Wight.

