

God's Frozen Assets

Chris Richards

Salt and Light Ministries

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First published 1999
by Salt and Light Ministries

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ISBN 1 901075 55 9

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Cover design: James Kessell Design (01296 747446)

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Foreword

“What is hidden in the roots will be revealed in the shoots.”

This has been one of the lifelong principles by which I have sought to live and build. Experience tells us that what the roots of the plant are like, and what they feed on, determines what sort of fruit grows; where the foundations of a building are shaky, time and disaster will reveal it; where the most simple flaws are not spotted, dreadful disasters can follow – as when a basic defect in the fuel system of the Challenger space craft cost the lives of seven brave astronauts.

So it is with people. What we believe in our hearts will eventually determine how we live, how we build and what we end up with.

This “Roots and Shoots” series is not so much an attempt to define the distinctives of our family of churches, but rather to ensure that all our beliefs and practices are firmly rooted in the Scriptures.

Many people have asked us over the years: “Who are you and what do you believe?” While our structure may appear to be somewhat nebulous, nevertheless the understanding of our common beliefs needs to be clear and unambiguous.

We are a family of churches that believe we are to be “sons of the kingdom” sown into God’s earth. The key that transforms “the word of the kingdom” into “sons of the kingdom” is *understanding* (Matthew 13:23). In the Lord’s first parable of the kingdom (the Sower), the ‘word’ of the kingdom – the seed – when properly received and understood produces fruit. In the second parable of the kingdom (the Weeds), we discover that the fruit has become the seed, and that the seed is “the sons of the kingdom”. The word, bearing fruit, producing seed as sons of the kingdom, planted in the world! That is our prayer for this series of books.

Barney Coombs

Preface

Chris Richards has been carrying this word on “*God’s frozen assets*” for the last five years. The Salt and Light European Apostolic Team has encouraged her to turn it into a *Roots and Shoots* booklet because we believe her message needs releasing to a wider audience. Chris senses a heart-cry among women for opportunities to function more fully in their God-ordained callings. “This is not a desire for position or prominence,” she writes, “but a longing to find their place alongside the men, to fulfil their ministry, and to produce kingdom fruit.” As Chris has listened to women, read their letters, and reviewed questionnaires filled in at our annual *Days of Destiny* summer camp, she says she has caught “no hint of self-promotion or a desire to usurp authority.” On the contrary, she has found that “many women stress a desire to disassociate themselves from feminism and reiterate their desire to be obedient to God’s calling within the divine order.”

For our part as an Apostolic Team, we want to encourage leaders to take a fresh look at the veritable gold mine we have in the women in our churches and to accept the provocation to face up to areas where we may have focused too narrowly on one section of the church to the detriment of developing others. Specifically, we are pleading that, unlike the ‘bag lady’ Chris writes of, who lived in poverty rather than in the fullness of her inheritance, we work together to develop, train and release those women who are longing to express their faith in many and various ways.

It is in the light of this that we commend this book to the churches – a book that is a challenge from Chris to the women; and a challenge from us as a Team to leaders in general. May God help us all to rise to that challenge!

Steve Thomas
Leader, European Apostolic Team,
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Introduction

One of the most poignant stories I have read recently was recounted by Nicky Gumbel (best known for his successful development of the *Alpha* course from Holy Trinity Brompton). He tells the tale of a ‘bag lady’ who lived on the streets and wandered around aimlessly, carrying all her worldly goods in various plastic bags. When she died and Nicky was asked to take the funeral, he was astounded to discover that this lady had, in fact, inherited a large fortune. She had a luxurious flat and many valuable paintings, yet chose a lifestyle of poverty and deprivation. To exist ‘on the breadline’ when there is no alternative is a sad plight; but to dwell in poverty when our inheritance is abundant riches and wealth is not only a sad, but also a ludicrous, situation.

In some ways this is a picture of some churches. While they have many gifted and talented women, there is much potential yet to be released and fulfilled. There is much treasure, many resources, that are not being used to their full. All of us would perhaps be quick to defend our own situation by quoting names of those on the mission field or by reminding critics of the army of women involved with our children’s work, and so on. Most, if not all, would feel we do not stand in the way of women being involved in various aspects of church life. However, while some women are fulfilled and happy with the way things are, others may feel they have so much more to give. There is a heart cry from some for opportunities to move from the sidelines and be more involved in the game. This is not a desire for position or prominence on their part, but a longing to find their place *alongside* the men, to fulfil a God-ordained ministry and to produce kingdom fruit.

The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 is a familiar one, but it is only in recent years that I have been impacted with the seriousness of burying the talents we have. This is not a story about an inconsequential choice. This

master expected a return from his investment. Lack of fruitfulness with what we have results in the rebuke of “worthless servant”! We need, therefore, to take a serious look, as both individuals and churches, at what resources we have and how we are investing them.

As I listen to women and read their letters, I do not see any hint of self-promotion or a desire to usurp authority. On the contrary, many stress a desire to disassociate themselves from feminism and reiterate their desire to be obedient to God’s calling within the divine order.

This book is an expression of a desire for us all to take a fresh look at the gold mine we have in our churches, to see where there might be fallowness instead of productivity or where we might be focusing too narrowly on one section of the church to the detriment of developing others. Most importantly, it is a plea that, unlike the ‘bag lady’ who lived in poverty rather than the fullness of her inheritance, we work together to develop and train those women who are longing to express their faith in many and various ways; to release “God’s frozen assets”.

Chapter 1

Good Foundations

A friend of mine bought her first house a year or so ago. She was thrilled. Living on her own for the first time she set about turning it into a home, making it attractive and comfortable. Several months later she began to notice cracks appearing and, to her alarm, over a period of time, they grew so big that builders had to be brought in. Major reconstruction work had to be done if the home was to stand. It was all to do with the foundations. Though the house looked perfect from ground level up, there was something wrong with the land on which it was built. The house was collapsing because of subsidence.

As we develop ministry, whatever it may be, it is vital that our foundations are sound. As we look at women's ministry, we have to first consider fundamental principles that are biblically based, or we will find the building cracking and collapsing as it goes up. So, what are those foundations?

Foundation 1: Adam and Eve-ness

It fascinates me that God chose to create the human race in two such distinct halves! It would have saved a lot of problems if humanity was one self-contained being who could reproduce more self-contained beings. However, in his divine wisdom and love of variety, God ordained male-ness and female-ness. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

This verse gives us two reasons to rejoice.

First, both men and women are made in the image of God. Both genders are a reflection of God himself. Woman was not an inferior being, an afterthought; but just as masculinity reflects one aspect of God's character, so femininity reflects another. God said about his creation that it was *good* ... very good (Gen 2:31). That means it is *good* to be a woman!

Second, God chose to invest femininity into woman and masculinity into man, and they are *different*. Having grown up in the 60's when there was an emphasis on 'uni-sex' and a social shift to 'equality', I find it a great relief that society is beginning to acknowledge that men are different from women!

Just recently in one of our meetings, a young lady was struggling with a microphone. Try as she might, she could not get it to work. A loud male voice boomed from the front, "It's because she's a woman." Amidst the laughter (and a little hissing!) a young man deftly took the microphone and immediately remedied the problem. It is true that women and machinery are often at loggerheads – (I personally find machines uninteresting and have no time for them; give me people any day!). It was possibly her 'womanliness' that, in part, contributed to the struggle with the microphone; but the man who fixed it probably was not too confident at making a fruit cake. Unfortunately it is all too easy to focus on the *lacks* of a gender and not on the *positives* of it. Yes, there are differences in how men and women think, react and act. But it is the challenge of the church to understand this and to learn to honour, appreciate and harness these differences.

But how can these differences be celebrated and appreciated? Much depends on whether we see the negatives or the positives. Like the tumbler half filled with water, we can see it as half full or half empty. For too long, I believe, there has been a negative approach to womanly characteristics. I myself have had to change my view of women over the years, so I am not laying blame for this solely at the feet of men!

Let's look at a few prototypes, first from a 'half-empty' then from a 'half-full' perspective.

Talkative, or good communicator?

It has been estimated that men speak on average 12,000 words a day, while women speak 24,000! Certainly women are known as talkers. But

on the positive side, women can be excellent at putting visitors at ease, finding out about them and making them welcome. They can also 'chatter the gospel'.

Negative, or realistic?

If you ask a couple how they are getting on, more likely than not, the husband will be positive while the wife will be more negative. The male approach is often, "Everything's fine, I can manage, I don't need help." The female approach is often open to share problems and receive advice. Negative? Or more realistic? Certainly, two different approaches to the same situation, with the truth being probably somewhere in the middle.

Over-emotional, or able to express feelings?

As I read some of the heart-rending Psalms where David pours out his heart to God, I am encouraged that we can be real before our heavenly Father. We do not have to hide our emotions and there is a freedom in pouring out our soul before him. I have found that in being honest before others, they in turn can be honest about themselves. Emotions make poor masters, but good servants. In finding appropriate expression we can draw closer to each other as we share in an atmosphere of 'heart to heart'.

Fussy, or administrative?

My husband Dave can be on the phone for thirty minutes deep in meaningful conversation. When I ask him about the caller, his response is often, "He's fine"! But if I tell him about a thirty minute phone call, it could take me another thirty minutes! I enjoy detail, while Dave appreciates a resumé. While this is not exclusive, it *is* common. Details can be necessary or unnecessary, depending on your viewpoint.

Etc., etc. ...

The list could go on. The question is this: do we see women in a negative or a positive light? Do we appreciate the need for female characteristics at different levels in our church projects, missions and leadership teams? It may be challenging to work together as men and women; but show me a marriage where there has not been problems of adjustments, yet where those adjustments were not ultimately worthwhile.

As Christians we should delight in these differences and not be surprised that women will bring a different perspective. Their concerns, their thinking, their approach, their needs and their gifting will all reflect their femininity as much as their physique does. Let us rejoice and appreciate male-ness and female-ness as God the Creator clearly does.

Free to be

If we grasp this fundamental truth, women will be free to be women instead of striving to be men, and men will honour and appreciate the value and need of women if we are to have a ‘completeness’.

First we need an *appreciation* of men and women, and secondly a *commitment* to work together. A few years ago a group of women involved in leadership in the Sarum Hill Congregation of Basingstoke Community Church were asked by the leadership team (who were overloaded with work) to look at certain issues and report back to them. It was near Christmas and they discussed what to send to those on the mission field; what the ‘poor’ should be given as gifts; how the older people in the church could be blessed through a lunch; how hospitality in the church could be increased; and how the children’s work might be improved. The women planned action that could be taken and made recommendations back to the leadership team. A wise leadership will know what to delegate and will use their resources well.

Foundation 2: Being a Helper

The first mention of anything in creation being ‘not good’ is recorded in Genesis 2. Before sin came into the world, the Bible tells us that things were not perfect for Adam! He had a perfect environment, all the provision that he needed and a relationship with God. Yet God saw that for Adam to be on his own was “not good”. “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Gen 2:18) We were not made to live and function alone. Adam *needed* Eve; man needed woman.

“Little helpers”

I have struggled over the years with the word ‘helper’. It always sounded second best and I felt a little resentful as I saw that the very essence of my creation as a woman was ‘to help’. When my children were little and they

wanted to 'help' me when I was working, I would often give them something insignificant to do that kept my 'little helpers' occupied while I got on with 'the real task'. I got to make the real decisions, and their little tasks were minor in comparison. This spilled over into my understanding of my place alongside men. They appeared to have all the exciting bits while I 'fiddled around' on the fringe. Two insights have helped me get over this.

Insights that helped

Firstly, I saw that, after creating mankind as men and women (Gen 1:27), God blessed them *jointly* and commissioned them *jointly* (v28-30). He gave them responsibility *together* to rule and reign over creation. This is no second-rate calling! God clearly expects men and women to function alongside each other – different, but complementary.

The second thing that helped me was understanding more about the word 'helper' (Gen 2:18). The root of the Hebrew word 'ezer' is the same as that used to describe God as the 'helper' of individuals and nations. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present *help* in trouble." (Psalm 46:1) "We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our *help* and our shield." (Ps 33:20) God himself is our help, our helper. In no way could that role be considered as inferior! In the same way the Holy Spirit is called a 'paraclete', literally, one called alongside to help. 'To help' in this sense is *a characteristic of the Godhead itself* and reflects the value and worth of being 'a help'.

A vast arena

Our outworking of this role, perhaps, has been too restricted and lacking in vision. It is a much bigger job than I first anticipated and is becoming bigger the more I go on!

Several years ago Dave was due to speak in a Celebration in Harare, Zimbabwe. The night before, he became ill and realised he would not be well enough to speak. He asked me to do it for him and I unexpectedly found myself in front of a large congregation 'preaching the sermon'. I did not see myself as a 'guest celebration speaker' but rather as helping my husband when he was unable to do something for himself. I began to see that all the work I did in the church, leading the leaders' wives, being involved in the school etc., was all part of *helping* Dave with his leading of the church. I was

doing things he could not do, but it was all part of the same ministry, pulling together. ‘Helper’, far from being a restricted word, is a doorway to a vast arena, if only we will see it.

All can ‘help’

For every husband, the idea of their wife as ‘a helper’ will be different. I know what Dave expects of me as ‘a helper’ alongside him, because we have talked about it. But couples, have *you* talked this through together?

And what about the widows, single mothers, unmarried and divorced women in the church? How can they ‘help’? Across our churches I see them involved in youth work, children’s work, administration, prayer co-ordination, intercession, organising hospitality, deaconing the over 60’s, teaching Alpha, serving on the mission field, and many others areas where they are helping by functioning in areas where they can serve and fulfil their gifting.

Who wants to advance the Kingdom?

As women discover and fulfil their calling in God, whatever that may be, even if they are unmarried, divorced, widowed or single mums, they are ‘helping’ advance the kingdom. As they operate in their calling, they are ‘pulling together’, taking up the work that has been designated to them, working in the vineyard alongside the men.

But for every one of those who is functioning, there are others who are struggling to find a place where they can ‘help’. If that is you, consider going to your elders and asking them where you can be a ‘helper’ in the church to fulfil your calling. For them to pray alongside you and seek God for a suitable place for you to function will not only release you, but will broaden the workforce in the church and help advance the Kingdom.

The women of the New Testament were not passive onlookers. They played an active, vibrant and vital role in the day to day function of the church, as well as service to their families. The status of marriage had very little to do with function. Indeed 1 Tim 5:10 commends the widow who is “well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.”

A place for the unmarried

Our churches' emphasis on family life and marriage has been extremely valuable over the years and is close to my own heart. However if, in bringing that emphasis, we have overlooked the unmarried in anyway, we need to change and do things differently.

When God chose a place of refuge and care for Elijah, he led him to the home of a poor widowed single mother. Many times our limited thinking has led us to overlook the widow and the unmarried. Here, perhaps, is the biggest area of 'God's frozen assets'. They are often the ones who have so much to give, as their lives are a testimony to God's provision and grace. Yet they can be the ones who are given fewer opportunities to function.

Out of strong marriages and strong families should come *an inclusiveness of those who are unmarried* and a greater vision to release them into their full potential in God. Leaders with a heart to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" may need to consider how doors can be opened for these women and who will disciple them into even more effective service.

Surely we want to be known as churches where *all parts* are functioning, where leaders prepare *all God's people* for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Eph 4:11-13). If you function in a leadership capacity, can I encourage you to look again at the single women you are responsible for and to consider if there are ways you can help them in their calling and gifting; if the teenage girls can be encouraged in discipleship and given opportunities to minister, serve and grow.

Foundation 3: A Submissive Spirit

What do we mean by 'submission'?

There is a story about a little boy who kept standing up on the pew during a church service. His mother repeatedly told him to sit down, but the little boy could not be persuaded and the mother became more and more frustrated. Eventually, in a hushed but threatening tone, she told her son that if he did not sit down she would take him outside and discipline him. The little boy sat down immediately. He then looked up at his mother and said, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but on the inside I'm still standing up!"

Outward obedience is not necessarily *submission*, for submission has to do with *a willingness to put yourself under the authority of one who is over you*. It is *not* subjecting yourself to abusive tyranny, nor a mindless yielding to the whims of another. It carries no suggestion of inferiority or worthlessness. It requires faith and will result in glorifying God. Jesus himself was fully yielded to the will of his father (Hebrews 10:7; Philippians 2:6-8) and all Christians are called to have the same attitude (Php 2:5).

Hebrews 12:9 says, “... how much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live.” All believers are told to submit to spiritual leaders (Heb 13:17), to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1,5; Tit 3:1; 1 Pe 2:13), and to one another (Eph 5:21). Children are to submit to parents (Eph 6:1-3), younger people to older people (1 Pe 5:5), slaves to masters (Tit 2:9; 1 Pe 2:18) and wives to husbands (Eph 5:22; 1 Pet 3:1).

We are all called to have a humble attitude as disciples of Christ. “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Pe 5:5) The Bible is full of submission; and within this context, it becomes less of an issue for women to submit to their husbands. Submission and humility are characteristics we should *all* be adopting, regardless of gender.

With the added exhortation for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and to give themselves up for them (Eph 5:25), submission becomes part of a larger picture, a beautifully fitted-together jigsaw of men and women pulling together, women yielding to the headship of men and men considering, appreciating and operating out of a spirit of a self-sacrificial love towards women.

One final thought on ‘submission’. In the mid 70’s I was an avid reader of Christian books to do with women’s issues (of which there were many) and I was convinced of the need for women to submit to their husbands. This was not an issue with me (in theory!) and I had the feeling that this was THE issue, that there was not much else to talk about to the women in the church. While my conviction has not changed, my perspective on it has.

Imagine for a moment a very high diving board. Lining up to jump off the top board is a line of women – all look vaguely the same, quietly edging their way up to the board a step at a time. As the women jump off the board, each one does a completely different dive. One goes backwards hitting the

water hardly creating a splash; another twists and turns; some simple dives, some complicated. No two dives are the same and to watch them is astonishing as yet more variety is demonstrated.

God spoke to me clearly through this picture. 'Submission' is like the diving board. It is foundational, the place from which women can do amazing feats. Take the diving board away and we cannot achieve the same heights. *But 'submission' is not an end, it is a beginning; it is the springboard, not the pool.*

Whether we are married or unmarried, this quality of a submissive spirit is, I believe, a vital part of the foundation of our ministry.

Foundation 4: Taking up the Bowl and the Towel

Many years ago I heard a tape on 'being a servant'. I felt rebuked as I realised that so much of my life revolved around me and that I did not have a servant's heart. I determined to put this right, and remembered that a friend was moving house shortly, with all the demands that brings. So I thought she might appreciate some apple pies so that she did not have to think about making desserts and could use her time more profitably. Being heavily pregnant and with two small children at my heels, it was no small feat to produce four or five apple pies to stock her freezer. I phoned her with the good news that apple pies awaited her and were ready to be collected. I sensed things were not going quite according to plan when she asked if she could be 'honest' with me. She explained that she was trying to use up things from her freezer and had quite a lot of fruit pies. To have more would be a burden, not a blessing! I could have cried. Here was I, trying to change, trying to 'be a servant,' and it was thrown back at me. At the first real attempt I had failed. What had gone wrong? As I checked my motivation, I could see I had been thinking of myself more than my friend. My desire was to bring about change in *my* life and I was doing it in my own determination and my own strength.

God was more interested in the state of my heart, and there began a process of the Holy Spirit enlarging my heart for others and teaching me to have compassion. Any serving I was to do was to come from this. As we develop any ministry God may have for us, we must always come from the

perspective of serving others with what we have. Whether it is gifts or ministry; doing the crèche or ministering to the poor, the foundation in our hearts must be ‘servanthood’. It is as we take up the bowl and towel and *serve with our ministry* that others will be drawn to Christ. Whenever I travel to different churches I try to take others with me, partly for companionship and encouragement, and partly to train them. I have noticed that the people I find easy to take are those who have a servant’s heart. They are not looking for a place and are not demanding. Their attitude is to serve, which inevitably releases me to draw them in more and more and to trust them with greater responsibility.

It is fashionable in today’s culture to be self-assertive, to fight for our rights and ‘stick up for ourselves’. As increasing hordes of people are trying to recover from battered and broken relationships and abuse of various kinds, it is inevitable that self-protection and defending oneself from being taken advantage of is the order of our day. But Christ’s way is different. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:28)

If we are to minister in the name and spirit of Jesus, we must come with a compassionate servant’s heart. Ministry is not for *us*; it is for *others*.

Chapter 2

Frozen or Functioning?

Spectator or Runner?

How I look forward to Wimbledon, the finest tennis championship in the world! I unashamedly put weightier things to one side for two weeks and fight off any guilty feelings while I watch the best tennis players in the world competing for the cherished Winner's Cup. Unfortunately my tennis life is watching rather than playing. I am an armchair athlete. A more serious consideration is, "Am I an armchair Christian?" Do I spectate as others run the race, or am I on the track fulfilling my call and realising my potential?

The disciples spent time *listening* to Jesus' teaching, learning about who he is and the principles of the Kingdom; but their lifestyle was one of *doing* – often being thrown in at the deep end of life where faith was a regular requirement. Jesus asked them to feed the 5,000 (Matt 14:16), encouraged Peter to walk on the water (Matt 14:29), and sent them out as lambs amongst wolves with very little material support (Luke 10:3). He is still looking today for those who will *listen* and *do*. Why? Because the saying is still true: "the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few" (Luke 10:2). My appeal is for women not to sit on the sidelines, but to become part of the army of *listeners* and *doers* because there is still so much to do.

Wherever you are at this time, see yourself as a labourer, not one who sits at ease. If you are mothering a young family, be the best mother you can be. Enjoy this short season and bring up your children with vision in your heart that you are training and discipling the next generation. If you are in the

secular work place, see your job as your mission field. Be the best you can be, drawing on God's strength to minister to those around you. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord ..." (Col 3:23). If you have been made redundant or are in a 'between' season, look for God to use each day.

Jacky lost her job recently. She could easily have become negative and discouraged. As she considered her next move and sought God about her future, she felt a sense of indignation that no one had responded in her neighbourhood to the invitation leaflets regarding Alpha (an introductory course aimed at non-Christians). Instead of dwelling on her own problems, she went round the area, inviting people along. To her joy, she discovered people who were willing to come. And in two days, with a little help from friends, there was an Alpha group of seven – and all because of one woman, in difficult circumstances, who focused on what God can do and who was willing to get on the race track rather than sit and watch.

A 'Yes-person' or a 'No-person'?

The time was fast approaching when I had to commit myself to taking on new challenges in being involved in a large countrywide evangelical conference for thousands of people. My nerves were failing! Panic was beginning to set in. I had been asked to do seminars with international speakers and had to work from unfamiliar material prepared by other people. The easiest thing would have been to say 'no'. As I was praying about this, I had a picture of a swimming pool (one of my least favourite places!). Even worse, I was in the water at the deep end feeling more than a little anxious. (I am virtually a non-swimmer.) God was clearly giving me a choice. I knew I could cry out for a life belt and be saved, or I could use my arms and legs, keep calm and swim to the side. So often we have that choice. We can take the easy option and simply say, 'no'; 'no' to God, 'no' to other people when they ask us to be involved. Or we can choose to live a life of faith, say 'yes' and trust in our wonderful God who never lets us down. With this approach we will be fruitful and experience much joy as we move out in God. (The conference, by the way, went well. God moved and I was the richer for having said 'yes'.)

Trust Another or Trust Yourself?

I have discovered over the years that many women tend to suffer from a poor self-image. Very few women have a natural confidence in their ability and often feel “I can’t do that”. So how do we grow in confidence?

One step is to *trust another’s view of you*. I am privileged to have a husband who believes in me. Many times I have felt ill-equipped to do what he has asked me to do. But it is *his* confidence in me that has drawn me on.

In Esther’s time, God’s people were in crisis. All Jews were to be killed (Esther 3:12-15) and Esther found herself as a central figure to this drama. Mordecai asked for Esther’s help. She was to entreat the pagan king for her people, but she knew that to enter the king’s presence without invitation could mean death. She explained that the king had not asked for her in thirty days and was clearly reticent and perhaps a little reluctant. But Mordecai’s question stirred her into action: “Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14) She chose to trust Mordecai’s assessment of her opportunity to make a significant change in history, even though she herself was questioning.

There are times when we need to forget our own assessment of our perceived limitations and trust another’s judgement, just as Esther did. Married women need to learn to trust the judgement of their husband; single women need to trust their pastor, elders, or those discipling them. If someone asks you to do something, it is because they see your ability to do it. They see a gifting or a talent that may be hidden to you. Trust them!

Mistakes and Progress, or Perfection and Static?

I recently caught the tail-end of a programme about the six wealthiest men and women in Great Britain. The interviewer’s final question was, “What tips would you give anyone wanting to be a millionaire?” I hurriedly grabbed pen and paper, anticipating a revolution was about to take place in my life. Pen poised, I was totally taken aback by what I heard. “Don’t mind failure. You learn so much. I’d rather have nine failures than one success.” I have not made my millions yet, but I have learnt a secret to progress!

You do not remember it, but you learnt this lesson at an early age. As you learnt to walk, there were many times when you fell down, possibly resulting in pain and tears, but you got up again ... and again ... and again. None of us likes to fail, or to get it wrong. We have a deep desire to 'look good' and be successful. But if we allow our mistakes to affect our progress, we will not get very far. John Wimber had a wonderful healing ministry; but the first ten people he prayed with for healing died! Fortunately he did not stop there; he moved on to make progress. Let us settle the issue: if we move out in ministry, we are going to get things wrong! But is it going to stop us from moving out again?

Psalm 34 from the translation called "The Message" includes these words: "Disciples so often get into trouble; still, Yahweh is there every time." How good that is to know!

Inside Comfort Zones, or Beyond Them?

We enjoy feeling comfortable and comforted. We only need look at a small hurting child run to his mother for comfort to realise that inside each one of us is that same tendency, particularly when life seems harsh and cold.

As we look at the life of Christ we see that the Christian lifestyle is not one of comfort. If we allow our desire for comfort to rule, we will become sluggish and ineffective in the work of the kingdom. The Bible is full of examples of hardship and persecution and the ultimate challenge of embracing the cross. Paul's list of hardships in 2 Cor 11:23-28 initially seems far removed from our experiences; but as we hear stories from Uganda, Burundi, India and other far-off lands, the women there have their own list, comparable with Paul's.

What about us? Have we settled the issue? Is God free to take us beyond our comfort zones; out of the armchair, and on to the track?

Chapter 3

Jesus the Radical

There are many valuable examples in the Bible of women whose lives were impacted by meeting Jesus. From various backgrounds, including some who were seen as ‘undesirable’, they were transformed as they met with the compassion and acceptance of the one who loved sinners and transformed lives.

How did Jesus Regard Women?

First, he did not keep to the rules! On many occasions he shocked even his own disciples, as many times his love and compassion crossed cultural and social barriers to touch a woman’s heart and change a life forever. The religious people were outraged at the company he kept. When “a woman who had lived a sinful life” anointed Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:37), the Pharisees were shocked that he had not perceived what sort of woman she was. Rather than accept that Jesus *was* aware of her lifestyle and that he chose to accept her offering, they deduced that he could not possibly have realised. Their restricted thinking, bound by religious tradition, could not grasp that a godly prophet could associate with such a one. Yet Jesus, well aware of the stir it would cause, accepted the pouring out of a sinner’s heart, as her tears and the ointment mingled together in an act of worship. Jesus used this act to teach about forgiveness, and then said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” (v48) She entered the house a sinner, with no chance of cleansing and forgiveness; yet she left a new woman, cleansed and forgiven.

Later, Luke refers to other women who had been healed and delivered and were now “with him” (8:2). Jesus had time for the women who were

outcasts, who needed release and forgiveness. By this very act he bestowed honour and respect upon them. He could so easily have passed them by, but chose to be misunderstood and maligned in order to minister to them.

The woman at the well (John 4) was someone else who would never forget her encounter with Jesus. She went to the well at noon, an unusual time for drawing water in the heat of the day, but perhaps did so in order to avoid confrontation with the respectable townswomen. It is likely that she carried shame and a sense of failure as she had previously had five husbands and was now living with another man. She herself was surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink of water (v9) for she was aware of the *cultural barrier*. As he continued to talk with her the *gender barrier* was broken, for women were considered to be inferior to men and no Middle Eastern man ever spoke to a woman in public, not even his wife or mother! Thirdly, the *class barrier* was broken, as no self-respecting man, especially a teacher, would converse with a woman of dubious reputation. When the disciples returned and saw what was happening, they were amazed (v27). Jesus' actions were revolutionary. The woman was clearly impacted, for she left her water jar and rushed into the city, rallying people to come and meet this man. This resulted in the Samaritans begging Jesus to stay with them for a few days, which he did and many came to belief in Christ. What a wonderful story!

God can use Us!

We can so often disqualify ourselves because of what we have done, the way we have lived, or simply because we feel inferior. But the examples we have looked at reveal God's heart for setting women free, for breaking down man-made barriers that would keep us distanced from Jesus and for releasing evangelistic zeal that brings others to Christ. Never feel that Jesus does not have time for you, that your gender is a problem to him, that he does not want to be associated with you, or that there is not a work for you to do. Resolve not to allow guilt or shame, or feelings of inferiority, to stop you from being available for Jesus to use you in ministry. Jesus loves to set people free from the past so they can be useful in the present and future. Read these and other similar encounters of Jesus and you cannot fail to see that his radical approach demonstrated the value he put on women.

And Jesus is still touching women today in the same way, in order that they might be effective in the kingdom of God, as the following story shows.

New Beginnings in Sweden

Maria was born to alcoholic parents. Her mother left home when she was eight months old, her father when she was eleven. She now lived in a flat alone in one of the poorer areas of town; and there began a lifestyle of alcohol, drugs and promiscuity. Before long, Maria got involved with the occult and became a Satanist. She became pregnant and had a little girl who was taken from her, as she was in no fit state to care for her. Maria became totally withdrawn. It was as though she had placed herself behind an impenetrable barricade. She became mentally ill and ended up in hospital where she stayed for two and a half years and where she met her husband.

It was at this point that a pastor's wife began writing to her and praying. Maria gave her life to the Lord and there began a series of deliverances. No-one in the hospital had believed that she would ever leave, but she became well enough to do so. She and her husband started to go to church. At first they were very weak, unreliable, and often ill. As she became stronger, she went along with one of the older women in the church and spoke at youth groups, giving her testimony and preaching. She has a heart for youth and now works with young musicians and helps lead worship in the church. The enemy's plan had been to destroy this young woman from an early age; but, like the woman at the well and the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, once she had met with the radical Jesus, her life was turned around.

Our past is never powerful enough to disqualify us from service. As we allow God to bring healing and deliverance, we are set free to minister to others. Often the very things that the enemy used for evil, God can turn and use for his purposes. We need never feel we are not 'good enough' to function in the kingdom. Our God is a redeemer!

Strategic Women

Throughout the life of Jesus, women were involved at strategic points. Mary had a divine visitation telling her of the birth that was to change the world. When Jesus was taken to the temple as a baby, Anna the prophetess

was there and she, along with Simeon, recognised that this was no ordinary baby, but the long-awaited Messiah. Throughout Jesus' ministry women from all levels of society travelled with him and ministered to his needs, often at their own expense (Luke 8:3); and Mary Magdalene was privileged to be the first to speak with the risen Christ and be commissioned to spread the good news (John 20:11-18). What a task to be given! She would probably remember every detail and delight in telling the story over and over again!

Above all Nations and Cultures

Kevin J Conner (*"The Church in the New Testament"*) sums it up like this: "Christianity brings the greatest honour and respect to the woman above all other nations and cultures." Jesus went against many Jewish traditions as he allowed women to touch him and even anoint his feet. Unlike the rabbis, he taught women the Word of God. To the woman at the well he revealed who he was and spoke to her about worship (not recorded in any other conversation he had), and he spent time with Mary and Martha. Paul too echoed this new stance when he encouraged women to learn (1 Tim 2:11).

Jesus ministered to men and women as crowds gathered round him, whereas historically women would have had a separate court within the temple walls. Women met with men to pray together in the Upper room (Acts 1:13-15). As they waited, men and women together received the Holy Spirit and became witnesses to the dawning of a new era. Together men and women spoke in tongues, and there was no distinction in the gift of the Holy Spirit who was poured out on "all people" (Acts 2:17).

The breakthrough Jesus made regarding the place of women in the New Covenant is quite startling. As Christian churches sprang up we see women now regarded as 'co-labourers'. They were given a place of honour and dignity and an opportunity to function alongside the men. In the words of Conner again: "There is plenty of scope in the New Testament church for the ministry of a godly woman without violating divine order." The church was indeed a community above all nations and cultures.

Chapter 4

A Ministry of Changing Seasons

As I bounced down the school drive having just deposited my third and youngest child for his first day at school, I felt mixed emotions. I felt an elation at the freedom and novelty of having opportunity to do something on my own for the first time in nine years; and yet there was also a sense of loss. What now? I would not be needed until 3.30 p.m. when my visit to the school gate would be my next contact with my children! Another season was about to begin. My thoughts were interrupted by another mother shouting across to me, “What are you going to do now?” She was clearly expecting me to take up a new career, or perhaps return to my old one and become an earner again, to fill my days with productivity. “I’m doing absolutely nothing for 3 months,” I replied. The shock registered on her face. I just did not fit in with what was happening elsewhere in society.

I had done remarkably well not to have come in for criticism over the years as I had chosen to be home-based while the children were small (four out of five women in the UK return to work before their youngest child leaves primary school and many return after maternity leave) and I was not going to make any major decisions until I knew the next course God wanted me to take.

There seems to be so little preparation for motherhood. Even after watching friends and making a mental note of those things you will never do, making another list of all those dreams and aspirations for your own, yet-unborn children, the reality is somehow different. Once the baby arrives, life changes and it will never be the same again.

But the tide of public opinion is changing and recent articles in secular women's magazines and daily newspapers have begun to sing a different tune. For years the feminists have had us believe we could 'have it all'; that women could be career women, carry major responsibilities at work, always look good, keep fit and healthy, run a home, maintain a marriage relationship and bring up children successfully all without becoming the victim of stress. The bubble is in the process of being burst. A heading in the Daily Telegraph, February 12th 1998, said it all: "*Hyperwoman is out: Homemakers are in*".

But is there more to motherhood than changing nappies, cooking meals and keeping home?

Ministry, not Job

Proverbs 6:20-23 gives us a broader perspective on motherhood: "My son, keep your father's commands and *do not forsake your mother's teaching*. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, *this teaching is a light ...*"

An interesting distinction is drawn here between the father's approach to training the child ("commanding") and the mother's ("teaching"). A command is a formal order, or instruction. It suggests having authority over the child. 'To teach' is to give systematic information. It enables a person to do something by training, often a skill. It can mean to 'advocate as moral' or 'to teach a doctrine'. This takes more time than simply to give a command or set a boundary. As a young child learns basic life skills, (to hold a spoon to feed himself, to catch a ball, to understand dangers, to learn to walk, to pray) someone needs to be there to encourage, to help, to direct. All this takes time; but it is a *ministry* not a *job*.

The Shaping of a Life

Behaviourists tell us that the most formative years are those early years of childhood. They say our basic character traits are formed by the time we are four years old! A mother, therefore, has a tremendous influence in the lives of her children, and subsequently in society at large. Proverbs 22:6 tells

us that if we train a child in the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it. In the scripture already quoted (Prov 6:20-23) a mother's teaching is an equipping for life; principles for living, a light. This is an awesome responsibility affecting future generations.

I sometimes stop and wonder what it must have been like for Mary to bring up Jesus as a little boy! She probably did not have some of the hassles we have had with our children. (If only all children could have Jesus' sense of purpose and submission to their heavenly father!) However, there must have been many times when Mary herself was weary with her chores and was challenged with the same task of teaching and training her children as best she could, bringing them up in a way that would best prepare them for their futures.

The Honouring of Motherhood

The writer of Proverbs 31 honours his mother's teaching (v1). In Exodus 20:12 we are commanded by God to honour our father and mother. Over the years I have heard 'fatherhood' honoured in the church, but very little mention of 'motherhood'. Fathering has been taught as an honourable and worthy role, and quite rightly so; but perhaps our understanding and appreciation of mothering has been somewhat lacking.

At a large national conference over the Easter of 1998 Rob Parsons was about to preach to a large crowd of several thousand. His subject was Elijah at the home of the widow. Things took an unexpected turn when he tenderly spoke of his regret at the lack of honouring of the mothers who had devoted their lives to the nurturing and training of the next generation. He highlighted the lack of love shown by the churches towards motherhood in general and single mothers in particular. The latter have carried the burden of family life in its many and varied aspects upon their lone shoulders, often trying to fulfil the impossible role of mother and father, resulting in weariness and a sense of never being able to do enough. As single mothers poured out to the front in response to the appeal, many eyes were moist with tears. Those mothers' faces were etched with lines that told a thousand tales of hardship and battle. As I mingled with these women, most could not even begin to tell their stories. It was a time of honouring, a time of praying, a time

of asking the Holy Spirit to minister into lives poured out sacrificially for the sake of their children. For many of these Christian women, their most fruitful ministry will be that borne out of the lives of their sons and daughters. I have never seen the single mothers in the church in the same way since.

Letting Go

Mothering has to do with protecting as well as training. When a woman gives birth to a vulnerable new life, she naturally is there to protect and defend. But there is a time to ‘let go’ too – and there is great skill in balancing these two aspects. Those with children will remember the agony of the first time you trusted your child on the stairs, or the first time you let them walk to school on their own. What about the time they passed their driving test and you watched your baby driving away in a killing machine! It takes faith to let go, but the ‘letting go’ is part of the equipping for life your child needs. We are not training up our children to fulfil *our* plans or to become what *we* want them to be; we are helping them discover God’s destiny *for them*. Our goal, as parents, is to train and release; and if we do one without the other, we will hinder their freedom in God.

As both our daughters left home at the same time, there was a sudden change in the family. Several people asked me how I was coping and assumed I would be struggling; but I wasn’t. Hannah was born to teach! She’s been doing it since she was about three! And to see her now established in training (and happy in it) leads me to feel as a mother, “mission accomplished”. Beckie left home to work on a project with ‘street girls’, setting off equipped with rape alarm. I had a choice – protection or release. My joy was immense as she phoned one night to say that she had been sharing the gospel with a couple of street girls. “Mum,” she said, “this is what I was made for.” How can I be sad at her going when I see the fulfilment of our mothering and fathering? God has a plan for each of our children and the joy of parenting is to see a fulfilment of that plan.

In 1 Samuel 1 we read of Hannah’s unhappiness because she had no children. When she was pleading with the Lord to give her a son, she promised she would give him back to God (v11). She gave birth to a son, Samuel, and while the child was very young, she took him and left him to be trained by an

elderly priest – and one who had not done a very good job with his own sons at that! She is a real example of releasing our children to God's purposes in faith, and with a rejoicing heart.

If mothering does not have the spirit of release within it, it will become a restrictive, self-oriented thing. Let us learn from Hannah's, "So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he shall be given over to the Lord." (1 Sam 1:28) The releasing process should be a gradual one that begins from birth so that when the child is grown up, there is an inner maturity to handle life. The point of marriage is a 'leaving' and a 'cleaving', a drawing away from the dependence on mother and father to enter a new family unit. We need to be practised in the spirit of release.

What about the Prodigals?

But what about the wayward child who walks his own path? As a child grows, the emphasis of motherhood changes. The older children are, the shift is even more towards prayer and intercession on their behalf. I asked my daughter, who had gone through a rebellious stage, what advice she would give to parents who were concerned about their children. "Do two things," she said. "Love them unconditionally, and pray." The attitude of the father in the parable of the prodigal son epitomises this. Unconditional love and prayer are the most powerful tools we have in affecting our children's lives.

Single Women and Motherhood

"A mother in Israel" is a phrase used by Deborah about her own ministry (Judges 5:7). But can an unmarried woman be "a mother in Israel"?

"Just as mothers are the best teachers of young children, these spiritual mothers will be some of the best teachers of new born believers," writes Rick Joyner (*"The Morning Star" article, entitled "The Greatest Teaching Ministry"*). As Alpha courses have been established across the UK over the last few months, I have seen more women finding a place of function and being excited about evangelism than ever before. They have sprung into life, inviting non-Christian friends along, cooking meals, door-knocking, speaking to non-Christian colleagues about Alpha, and leading discussion groups. Single and married women alike are becoming 'mothers' in the kingdom as

their nurturing and teaching has found a place to blossom. What a wonderful opportunity for older women to share from their wisdom and experiences of life – whether a natural mother or not – and to fulfil the call of Titus 2:3-5. In our local Alpha group, women are leading women’s groups and men and women together are leading mixed groups.

Surely this is a cause for rejoicing with Isaiah when he said, “Sing O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.” (Isa 54 v1)

I value the input and role models of our single women who have input into our two daughters. Both have a special relationship with women who do not have children of their own – one single, one widowed. Their input is something I cannot give them as their natural mother, and the value of their discipleship and influence is enormous. Women, young and old, married and unmarried, indeed have the opportunities to be “mothers in Israel”.

Apostles, Prophets – and Grannies!

I was staying in a home recently with a lady who had a two year-old grandson. She had run her own successful business and felt God was leading her to sell it, which she did, without knowing what she was to do next. Her daughter, also a career woman, wanted a child but suspected she would not conceive easily. She asked her mother whether, if she did become pregnant, she would be willing to look after the child each day so she could continue her career. The grandmother agreed and in fact the grandson was born without a long wait. The love, care, training and nurturing in God’s ways by this grandmother was a joy to behold. This little boy was spending quality time each day with someone who took her responsibilities seriously. As the little boy was going to bed one night, he asked his non-Christian daddy to pray with him “like Grandma does.” The grandmother is affecting the child and the child is influencing the father. The whole family now prays together.

The grandmother, able herself to have a successful career, felt called of God to train and teach her grandchild. She has a vision for his life and a vision for her part in it. When the child starts school, adjustments will be made again, and life will change again.

As this story was recounted to me and I saw the influence of a grandmother during these formative years, my mind immediately turned to Paul's words to Timothy: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." (2 Tim 1:5) Many a 'big name' in ministry has had the backing of a praying Granny!

Seeing beyond Motherhood

We can sometimes become discouraged with the endless routine of keeping home. It can be tempting to think that we are not doing anything worthwhile as we see others with time to pray and study, with immaculate homes and spare rooms prepared for the next visitor. Our minds can be filled with shopping lists and 'things to remember' and we long for that elusive activity called 'a quiet time'. *Whatever season you are in, sow into that season.* Accept its limitations and look for its joys, for it soon will pass and you will look at your grown up family and wonder where the days went.

The seasons of motherhood change rapidly and we have to change with them, knowing that, important though it is, there are new fields to harvest. New opportunities will open, a new leg of the race is to be run. Your experiences will always be a resource for you, but your identity will change. Take courage and seek out the next challenge.

Chapter 5

One With God: The Advantages of Singleness

In a recent survey taken among ‘Salt and Light’ churches, 38% of the women were single. This is a significant percentage, and one that ought to provoke us to consider how we are facilitating more of a release for these women who have gifts and talents, many of which may be currently under-used and an untapped resource.

Now, I had a choice when it came to writing this chapter. I could either write about singleness from my own perspective as a once-single-but-now-married woman; or I could get a single woman to write it for me, out of her present experiences. I opted for the latter. So what follows has been written by Jacky Farrow, who is single and in her thirties. Jacky has a responsible job in the secular world as a Quality Manager and has been a Christian since she was 12 years old. Here she gives her own perspective on being an unmarried Christian in today’s church.

One Woman’s Revelation

“I am 35, single, have never even had a boyfriend (though one day would like to be married!). I used to think that this was abnormal, a view certainly reinforced by society around me and even some friends and family. I was given a prophecy several years ago in the form of a picture of me as a pine tree set apart on my own from the rest of the pine forest so that I could remain pure and untainted. It was a revelation to me that God had actually

deliberately set me apart as a single woman to fulfil his purpose and that being single was a very important key to being released into ministry.

I perceive that very often single people (especially women) are seen as a problem to the church, and that singleness is thought to be God's second best. I want to testify to being a fulfilled single woman who has been more and more released into ministry since recognising that it is all part of his plan for my life.

Single for Purpose

“There are obviously different types of ‘single’ women: the not-yet-married, the widowed, the divorced, the single mother, the never-will-marry, and the women with non-Christian husbands (with the particular pressures for church life that this brings). We make a big mistake if we try to put all of these into one homogenous group called ‘singles’ and treat them all the same.

The truth is, however that the creator of the universe knew each one of us before we were born; he planned us and knit us together in our mother's womb and had a plan and purpose for our lives (Ps 139:13-16).

If you are currently single – even if it is not part of your choosing – God has a plan and purpose for you. We may not understand it, or even like it, but we can be 100% certain that God wants to use every gift and skill and ability that he has placed within us. “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph 2:10) Mark 12:25 tells us that, “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage ... ” In eternity, we will all be single! The focus of our whole being will be on worshipping and serving God; so being single now gives me chance to practise at it!

Positive Practicalities

“I recently conducted a brainstorm at a ladies' seminar on singleness to draw out the positive aspects of being single and the key word that kept coming out was ‘freedom’. Comments included things like:

- freedom to have time with God on your own without having to find somewhere away from your spouse

- freedom to sing, shout, pray out loud etc. if you live on your own
- freedom to be involved with church activities/ministry as you choose

All of these may not be relevant, especially if you have dependent children or older relatives for whom you are responsible; but many certainly apply to a large number of single women.

This whole understanding and appreciation of freedom was brought home to me very clearly when one of my best friends was recently married. Previously we had been able to spend considerable time together, engage in sporting activities, invite each other round for meals and so on. Now she is married, her first priority is, quite properly, to her husband. The amount of freedom to do what she wants, when she wants, has been dramatically reduced. I want to fully use my present freedom to make sure that the gifts and abilities that God has placed in me are being fully released and developed as I serve him wholeheartedly.

The Paul's Eye View of Singleness

“In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul answers questions that had been put to him by the church at Corinth. Corinth was a city full of sin, idolatry and sexual immorality and the Christians in the church were surrounded by these issues and the pressure to conform. They were eager to know Paul's view on the right way to behave, including whether, in the light of those pressures, it was better to be single or married. (Some Greeks had rejected sex and marriage altogether.) In many ways, the society in which we live also exerts pressures in the area of sexual immorality, and the answers that Paul gives them is just as relevant for us today.

Paul sees *both marriage and singleness as gifts from God*. The one is not superior to the other; rather, both are valuable in accomplishing God's purposes. He stresses that it is important for us all to accept our present situation. If you are single, he says, you need to see it as a gift from God for a purpose and not as second best.

But he then goes further than this and actually says that, in several different ways, being single is better. (See 1 Cor 7:1,7,8,25,26) So why is Paul so keen on singleness? It is because he wanted everyone to follow his example in being *totally dedicated to the work of the Lord*, and he believed

that the married could not give themselves as wholeheartedly to that. He points out that single people are free from the “concerns of the world” (1 Cor 7:32-35). Paul is longing to see Christians given over totally to working for the Lord without distraction. He in no way denigrates marriage; but he also makes clear that if you are single, you have far more freedom for release into ministry. Quite a challenging thought in our society!

The more times I have read this passage, the more excited I have become personally about being single. I can see the many opportunities that lie ahead for serving the Lord and my response to God is to say, “Thank you for allowing me to be single.”

Singles – A *Gift* to the Church

“It is all too easy for us singles to see ourselves as *‘problems’*; but if we see ourselves as *gifts*, it totally changes our perception of who we are and what we can do.

Romans 12:1 says, “Therefore I urge you, brothers (and sisters!), in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” One way that we can fulfil this plea from Paul is to give ourselves to the church body in serving his people and his leaders.

If you are a leader in the church, can I ask you to consider whether there are single women offering to serve the church whom you have overlooked or maybe even discounted? Often it is the single women who have more time and energy available to serve and function in their giftings.

Chrissie Chapman is a single lady who has not let singleness become a problem, but has used it to give herself wholeheartedly to the work of caring for babies and orphans in Burundi. As she says, “One person can make the difference.” And she has proved that by giving herself sacrificially. I do not want to find that at the end of Jacky Farrow’s life I look back with sadness and regrets because I have not fulfilled the purposes God had for my life. I want to have given myself, knowing that one single woman can make a difference.

Over the years I have had a variety of opportunities to function. I have been enormously blessed and have had a church pastor and wife (who have

also disciplined me) who wholeheartedly believe in releasing single women into ministry. I have been on a variety of overseas teams where, as a single woman, I have had the freedom to decide to take time off work and use money for the air fare, and have then been ‘exposed’ to all sorts of challenges, from preaching and praying for the sick, to door-knocking in mud hut villages and buying in a Bosnian market. All of these experiences have stretched me and challenged me. My freedom as a single woman has released me to set up a door-knocking team around the local housing estates and to organise ‘acts of kindness’. I have co-ordinated and led Alpha groups, been part of a housegroup leadership team, and been the administrator for our local congregation and therefore part of its leadership team. I had the freedom to spend nine months of my life at King’s Bible College with no ties except giving up my job and renting out my house. I have been part of the ministry team at ‘Days of Destiny’, without having to worry about looking after a family. I have administrated conferences and organised catering for events, because I have had time and the freedom to be involved. I try to move in prophecy and words of knowledge for healing as often as I can, and have been involved in leading ladies’ events and weekends. I have had opportunities to preach and teach in various churches and have been involved in seminars at ‘Days of Destiny’.

I give this list, not to boast in any way, but to show you that *we as single women have the freedom to do all these things* – and more! I am so grateful to God, and to my pastor and leaders, that they have not seen singleness as a barrier or a hindrance to my functioning. Before doing most of the things I have mentioned, I gave myself to serve the church in any way – operating the overhead projector, serving tea and coffee, putting out chairs etc. There are many positive practicalities of being single; so let us embrace and use the freedom that is ours.”

What a Testimony!

I trust that you found this testimony of Jacky’s powerful and challenging. How wonderful it is to see a woman who has so grasped the value of her present state of singleness as a blessing from God and sees it as an opportunity to bless the church. What a difference it would make if all of us could look how we could release even more blessings like that among us!

But there are two other aspects of singleness I also want to touch on, to add in to all that Jacky has already said. And those two areas are single parents and widows. Let us think about single parents first of all.

Single with a Family

As family life continues to break down in the West, our churches will inevitably include more and more single mothers (and possibly, fathers). The church has generally been slow to appreciate their plight, and also their potential. Theirs can be a very lonely role. Where the married woman has someone to share with at the end of the day, the single mum may have no one. Yet, ironically, this situation that brings such pain can also become the strength that sets her apart as a blessing to others. Out of a reliance on God alone, rather than on another human being, can grow a relationship with God that is to be envied. It is now that the Bible's promise that God will be a husband (e.g., Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14) can indeed become a personal reality.

It is out of this reality that single mothers can minister to others, often oblivious to the quality radiating from their lives. For example, I have seen a vibrancy in worship in single mothers that reflects their love for the one who will *never* leave them, who will *never* discard them, and who understands their pain and rejection. Out of this knowledge, it is then so much easier to take all their small, practical, everyday needs to him who is committed to them as their Redeemer, even in their present situation.

Financial need often dictates the necessity for single mums to work outside the home; but this responsibility can also become an opportunity. I have observed that they often have a considerable ease in evangelism, especially in the workplace. Perhaps it is their intimacy with God, or their having proved God in hard times, that makes it natural for them to share the good news with others.

As their families grow up and seasons change, the lone mother can explore the new freedom that is now hers. For example, a friend of mine is considering going to Bible School as she realises that family commitments are loosening and that she is fully able to follow God's leading without the restriction of a husband or family to consider.

A sense of failure and lack of worth often accompanies single parenthood, especially if a broken relationship is the cause. As churches find ways, not only to support in these situations, but also to train and involve them, single mothers can find their gifting and calling in God. Encouragement is particularly important when these women fight the thought they have failed and have nothing to offer. As we encourage, disciple, train and open up opportunities, we can see yet more of the workforce released, yet more of “God’s frozen assets” unlocked.

Single – Again!

There is one aspect of singleness that most women who are married will find themselves in one day, and that is widowhood. Widowhood can seem like an end to everything. Yet when the initial pain eases and, surprisingly, life goes on, it also can be the opportunity for new beginnings. Once again, I am not the best qualified to speak to this issue; and so I have asked another friend, Delia, to share her insights and experiences with us in what follows:

Widowhood: Delia’s Story

“When I was first widowed it was difficult to feel I had an identity or to grasp what the future could hold for me. Much of my life had been in partnership – deciding and doing everything together. Suddenly, I didn’t seem to be able to decide anything. However, the pain does subside and God *is* faithful. Isaiah 46:4 says, ‘I am your God and will take care of you until you are old and your hair is grey. I made you and will care for you, I will give you help and rescue you.’ Many times over the years I have repeated this verse back to God in prayer, and always he has provided the care I needed. It is easy to be negative when you are left alone and your family has grown up; but as I went through the first few years I found out from God’s word that *his heart is for the widow*. With such covering to my benefit, I believed I was in a privileged position in God’s heart!

There have been adjustments to be made; and, if you have had a leadership role with your husband, you can now feel that you are on the ‘outside of the circle’. You can get upset and hurt; or, you can realise that, although there are couple-orientated things of which you will never be part,

there are also many other avenues which would never have been discovered unless you were single. For me it was a move to another area, to another fellowship, to working in the church office and to joining a church team to Zimbabwe. What I found there and what I discovered inside myself turned my focus to view the future positively. I am now sixty-three years old and even now God continues to open up new doors which he invites me to pass through.

I have been privileged to travel to many places, to be involved in various teams and projects in the church, and have just returned from my fourth visit to Zimbabwe. I still have days when I miss my husband and dream of the past; but someone once said to me many years before my husband died, 'You will never dream what God has in store for you.' That has certainly been true! But, I am not unique! God wants all of us, whatever our status, to discover how his purposes can be outworked. My *life* changed – God's *purposes* didn't!"

Real People

I deliberately chose to let most of this chapter be written by 'real people' (if you see what I mean!). For there is nothing more powerful than *testimony*; testimony to the grace of God that can be found in *every* situation, testimony to how it is possible to *always be fruitful* in God's purposes. The challenge to singles is: will I embrace the opportunities God has given me? Or will I bemoan my circumstances, and thereby miss what God has for me? And the challenge to the rest of us is: will we look creatively how to make use of these 'frozen assets' among us?

Chapter 6

Having Vision

Little Woman – Big God

Many years ago, a twenty-six year old parlour maid with no theological training or social standing, and two and a half old pennies in her pocket, noticed an advert for someone to join a missionary in China. “That’s me! That’s me!” she cried out. And a vision was about to be realised. Gladys Aylward’s heart burned with a passion for China; but every circumstance was against her. She had no finances to purchase the ticket and she had been turned down by the China Inland Mission. It seemed hopeless. Yet through a series of miraculous events in 1930 she left for China, a woman alone facing many dangers and ultimately having great effect in the land that was on her heart. She was a little woman (only 5 feet tall!) with a big God.

The Importance of Vision

“The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but no vision”, wrote the blind writer Helen Keller. One of the most exciting adventures we can have is to discover our vision, our destiny in God.

Every one of us was saved for a purpose. We are not all called to go to China; but we are *all called!* Paul wrote: “But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, *who has saved us and called us to a holy life ...*” (2 Tim 1:8-9) If we live without a sense of vision, we will operate out of our own humanity and strength rather than faith and the anointing of God.

When we have vision, we have a sanctified enthusiasm because we have a sense of destiny and fulfilment.

Eric Liddell in the film *Chariots of Fire* says, "God made me fast; and when I run, I feel his pleasure." What is it in *your* life that gives you the sense of 'feeling God's pleasure'?

Buried Visions

Several years ago I asked myself the question, "What are the things I would like to do if I had the choice?" I made a list and my husband encouraged me to pray about them. Within a few days, a door opened for me. I had always wanted to work with the homeless. In a small way I had been involved years before with a hostel in Oxford, but it was as though the sands of time had blown over my vision and it had laid buried for many years. I realised that the passion was still flickering. I prayed for God to open the door if he wanted me to be involved in any way. The very next week there was a notice in our church bulletin asking for help with a soup run in the town. Having been in our present church for 12 years and never remembering having seen a notice like this before, I could only believe that this was my answer. I went along to help in the soup kitchen and spent lunch time serving meals and washing up. Strange as it may seem, I had the same sense as Eric Liddell: I felt God's pleasure. Part of me had 'come home'. My weekly prayer on the way to the soup kitchen was, "Lord, open any doors you want me to walk through. If you open them, I'll walk through them." After the very first day I was asked to be on the committee; and since then I have been privileged to have met our local MP to discuss the local homeless situation and, most significantly, to have helped establish a hostel in our town.

Many of us have buried visions. They are not dead; they simply need to be revived. Perhaps if I had not taken time out to bring my dreams before God that day, I would not be doing what I am doing now. Do you have buried dreams? Uncover them, lay them before God and ask him to open doors of opportunity for you. In Acts 16 we see how the Holy Spirit closed one door and opened another, as Paul and Timothy were prevented by him from speaking in Asia (v6) and were then led, through a vision, to go over to

Macedonia (and so to modern Europe) to work there. When we have a vision from God, no one can close the door that is opened up to us.

The Impossible made Possible

Gladys Aylward was caught in a net of impossibilities. Everything in the natural world said ‘no’ to her going to China. But the vision would not hear ‘no’ and her God who fulfils his plans opened up the way.

Several years ago I met a lady who asked me to pray with her. I had never met her before; she was middle-aged, married to a non-Christian husband, had teenage sons, suffered with a bad back, and had no money. “But I have a burning desire to go to Bosnia to take relief.” As I prayed for her I could only ask God to overcome these situations and make that which seemed impossible, possible. A year later she sought me out and reminded me of who she was. “Thank you for praying,” she said. “God has healed my back and provided finances for me to go to Bosnia next month – and my husband’s coming with me!” We can so easily dismiss our dreams as impossibilities; but if we have vision, even in seed form, it can be the beginning of big things. Nurture the vision with prayer and faith, and see what happens.

An Even Bigger Vision

When a group of us felt called to live together in community in the 1970’s we had a vision. We felt God wanted the large house we lived in to be used to offer hospitality to weary ministers and to be a refuge for those who needed prayer, deliverance and restoration. We also had an evening meeting for those in the area who were looking for a charismatic style of worship (few and far between in those early days!). This indeed happened, but we were surprised when things developed into a completely different arena. People came in ones and twos to ask if they could worship with us on a Sunday and we had more people joining us every week. Something far bigger than our initial vision was taking place. Very soon we had a ‘house church’ in our home; and before too long, we needed to choose between our secular jobs and serving the church.

Many women I know have set out in obedience and faith, only to be astounded at what God did, despite them! Joanna and Elaine, for example,

began a pregnancy crisis centre in Basingstoke in the mid 80's, to help local women who were faced with the trauma of an unexpected pregnancy. They believed that being there to help, even in a small way, was better than doing nothing. Little did they imagine that this simple step would grow into the one hundred and twenty Crisis Centres across the UK, with many others overseas. Joanna and Elaine describe themselves as “just two ordinary middle-aged women” and are amazed at what happens when we take a small step in following a vision. Little women with a big God.

Recognising the Vision

In Acts 26, Paul is giving his defence to Agrippa and recounts his conversion experience (v12-18). I envy this dramatic encounter Paul had with Jesus, not principally because of the conversion experience it was for Paul, but primarily for the vision he was given for his life. In a few moments he had a revelation of who Jesus was and his whole purpose in life was turned around. He knew he was to testify to Jesus (v16), was commissioned to go to the Gentiles (v17), and was even given the message (v18)! If only it had been so clear for all of us when we became Christians! It would have saved an awful lot of confusion, self-examination and uncertainty if a divine letter had landed on our doorstep the day we gave our lives to Christ with a laid-out plan for our lives!

But while Paul's ministry was made very clear to him from day one, most of us struggle to discover our purpose in life and can spend years before we reach a point where we can see who we are and what we were made for. But are there things we can do to help bring clarity, peace and a sense of fulfilling the call of God?

The Process of Discovery

There is a *process* involved in discovering our destiny. *Who* you are as a person is often the biggest key to *how* God will use you. As a young child plays, unaware of any purpose in its life, we can pick up significant keys. One mother's comments about her children illustrate this. She told me about her two little girls, how different they were! One daughter was captivated by the sun on the windows. “Look mummy,” she would say, “the sun is stroking

the window”. She now wants to be a poet or an actress. The other daughter was quite different. She once wanted a digger for Christmas. As she opened her present on Christmas morning, there it was. But instead of joy, she burst into tears. “But I wanted a *real* one,” she cried. She now wants to train as an engineer.

However hard we may try, we can never get away from these essential differences in who we are. This is who God has made us; it is to do with our ministry, and we can celebrate in it! God has a different life mapped out for these two girls; each one will be effective in the kingdom in completely different ways. And so with you. Your ministry is ‘who you are’. *You as a person* are a gift to the body of Christ.

I was never very good at sports as a child, and sports day was an anathema to me. However, when the school had to choose someone to give a speech on a local historical figure, Samuel Johnson, in the middle of the market place to townsfolk and local dignitaries, I was delighted to be chosen. I did not know it at the time, but there would be many more opportunities to stand behind microphones speaking to crowds of people! My destiny was there in seed form long before I was aware of having a calling in God.

Apply this to those so-called ‘wayward children’ among us. They are often not being rebellious, so much as struggling with things like prophetic gifting or ruling gifts. They carry the gifting, but they do not yet know how to handle it – and hence the frustration or ‘waywardness’. Saved or unsaved, the gifting will come through!

Who you *are* (not only what you can *do*) is a significant factor in finding and developing your ministry. Some of the points in the next chapter may be helpful to discover who God made you to be and how you can minister to others.

Chapter 7

Identifying your Innate Ministry

Here are eight pointers that can help us discover who we are and how we can minister. I do not pretend it is a complete list; simply some of the things that I have found helpful as I have sought to help others.

1. Look at your Background

a) The life you have lived

Your upbringing has affected you. A good stable Christian background will have trained you and made who you are today. But an unstable background with pain and hardships can also be used by God. In his redemptive plan, he can use your experiences to minister to others.

b) The problems you have worked through

As you have known freedom and healing through your darkest times, you will have a heart for others who walk the same path. It has been a privilege for Dave and myself to pray with many childless couples who are struggling with childlessness, having walked that way ourselves. Out of our own experiences comes a compassion that God can use. Some of the most powerful ministries in our pregnancy crisis centres are those women who have experienced healing from their own abortions.

c) The training you have done

God does not waste our training. For example, those who have trained academically make wonderful teachers; and many times we have valued

those skilled practically in building work done in Africa and around our churches.

2. Look at Prophecies regarding your Gifting or your Future

I was in a dilemma. Should I continue to be involved with the homeless or should I concentrate on other areas? I needed to hear to God. A prophetic man in our church prayed about it and God showed him a picture of me, complete with headscarf and wellingtons, standing in a rubbish tip. Not a very glamorous picture! But as he shared it, it was confirmation to me that, at that time, I should continue to be involved with those who sometimes feel they have been put on the scrap heap by society.

3. Ask: What Positives and Negatives have been said about Me?

Listen to people when they compliment you. We can easily disregard positive comments and focus on our negative feelings about ourselves. When people make positive comments, it is probably the gifting of God that they are seeing. But equally, do not be afraid of the negatives; they sometimes enable us to see what we *are*, by seeing what we are *not*!

4. When do you feel Fulfilled?

When you are fulfilling your destiny, there will be a sense of joy and the knowledge of 'this was what I was made for'. It may be when you have invited a neighbour in for coffee or helped them out in some way; or maybe you have spoken to a friend about your faith. Perhaps you have just taught a child (finally!) to tie his shoe laces or to get on to the next reading book. The list is endless; but take note of that sense of fulfilment and achievement as it can often be indicative of who you are.

5. What are you Good at?

At weddings I am constantly amazed at those women who take the responsibility for making the wedding dress or the cake or organising the reception. Dorcas was loved for her ministry of making garments for people (Acts 9:36). But those with practical skills often put themselves down and

do not appreciate their own gifting. The Body of Christ is made up of many parts. Let us rejoice in our differences rather than compare ourselves with others, which leads only to despair or destruction.

6. How do you Naturally Bless Others?

One of the most wonderful discoveries I have made over the years is that our calling and ministry is like a tailor-made garment; it fits us perfectly. That is why it is so important to concentrate on what *we* should be doing rather than envying others and what *they* do.

When our children were small and Dave was away from home, I was constantly amazed at the practical care others showed me. One Sunday I was invited to lunch and tea with the three children by a friend who lived on a farm. She wrote a card to each child as though written by different farm animals inviting them to visit the barn. While the children were taken off my hands for a few hours and I was replete after Sunday lunch, I sat down in front of a roaring fire to relax on my own. I have never forgotten that day. The children and I were ministered to in a very special way; yet to my friend and her husband this was as natural as breathing. They are loving, caring folk who naturally bless others through constant giving of their home and time. They do not think twice about it; it is simply who they are.

7. What Keeps Burdening You?

When the pregnancy crisis work was beginning in our church, and appeals for help were given, I often felt pangs of guilt. I had the time and opportunity to be part of this new and exciting venture; I could see it was to be an effective work and would affect many lives; but I just did not have a burden in my heart and I agonised over this. I recognised that this was not my field to work in, and some words from Thomas Kelly released me from feeling guilty at what I do not do, and into being satisfied from what I do! “The Loving Presence does not burden us equally with all things, but considerately puts upon each of us just a few central tasks, as emphatic responsibilities. For each of us these special undertakings are our share in the joyous burden of love ... we cannot die on every cross, nor are we expected to.” (*Thomas R Kelly, 'A Testament of Devotion'*)

If there is a stirring of compassion when you see certain people groups, it is probably because you are called to minister to them in some way, and God has allowed this compassion to stir in your heart. I have seen women break down in tears as they pray for the lost, for the youth, the blind, the abused and different ethnic groups. If you recognise this within yourself, ask God to direct you and show you how you can be involved. Do not feel you are unqualified to be effective. If you have passion and compassion mighty things can happen.

8. What Frustrates You?

Teachers can get frustrated with preachers; evangelists can get frustrated with teachers; servers can get frustrated with others who do not help; and prophets can get frustrated with administrators! *Often our frustration is an indication of our gifting.* The challenge is for us all to find where we fit and play our part in the whole scheme of things. As we operate alongside each other, there will inevitably be clashes. But appreciation of our own, and others', gifting helps.

Chapter 8

Horizons: How High do you Want to Go?

“A leader’s vision of the horizon allows people to see the heights of their possibilities. Each individual will determine how high he or she wants to go.” (*John Maxwell, “Developing the leader within you”*)

We accept that God can use us, that he has a plan for each of us, and that we have ‘kingdom work’ to do. But what are the possibilities open to us as women? The following list is in no particular order!

Teaching

While there is ongoing debate in Christian circles as to the significance of 1 Tim 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over man ...”, it is clear that women have a mandate to teach and train in specific areas, for example, to children (Prov 6:20) and to other women (Titus 2:3-4).

Paul was probably distinguishing in 1 Timothy between authoritative ‘governmental’ or ‘directional’ teaching in a public meeting (the responsibility, not of men, but of elders and teachers), and the sharing of testimony or life experiences illuminated from God’s word. Priscilla and her husband Aquilla certainly would have done the latter when they “explained the way of God more adequately” to Apollos in a home and private setting (Acts 18:26).

The injunction for older women to teach younger women gives great opportunity for teaching, training and encouragement. I have seen many women find fresh vision, freedom from bondage, and spiritual refreshment

as they meet together around the Word of God, sharing and ministering to each other. There is much more that can be done in response to this Scripture.

Training

In Faith Ministries, Zimbabwe, the leading women take their responsibilities seriously in training other women in the church. They have prayerfully sought God for the theme for them each year and there is opportunity for all women to be involved in women's meetings which are designed to train and bring them to maturity. All this is against a cultural background of 'non-ministry'. Moving from a passive stance of non-involvement, women are encouraged to belong to housegroups where they can pray, share and care. They also have prayer partners and are encouraged to minister to each other. This is a pioneering work where women are being mobilised into action and trained how to be effective within their spheres.

Youth discipleship groups are also a good training base. In our own church we have seen lives gradually being transformed through the "*Enemies of the Soul*" discipleship programme, with women leading girls' groups.

Preaching

Delia has just returned from Zimbabwe where she preached about 'Care in the church' and was a great inspiration to the leaders. On returning home she was asked to share in her own church. Her manner was self-effacing and, as she presented beautifully illustrated overheads, we laughed at ourselves as we identified with the characters she spoke about. She shared from personal experiences and equipped the church by her inspirational approach. There are only a limited number of Sundays in a year, but could we not consider giving more opportunities in housegroups, ladies' meetings and youth meetings for women to preach when they have something valuable to share?

Chrissie Chapman, who runs an orphanage in Burundi, preached to a crowd of several thousand at 'Days of Destiny'. Who could fail to be touched by her experiences, her stories of God's work, and her exhortations? Her message will remain in the hearts of all who heard her.

Leading and Participating in Worship

Miriam, the prophetess, led the women in music and dancing and encouraged them in singing and worship (Ex 15:20-21) – surely not the last woman that God anointed for this role! Paul certainly encouraged the women to prophesy in the meetings along with the men (1 Cor 11:5; 14:31). Prophecy, music and leadership can be a powerful combination, as Miriam demonstrated.

Counselling and Care

Pregnancy Crisis Centres have mushroomed over the past ten years, mainly because so many women have found an outlet to love, care and help needy people. Others are involved with family training, counselling and helping produce marriage training courses. Deborah is an Old Testament example of a woman whose counsel was sought by Israel as she sat under a tree, discussing their problems and giving advice (Judges 4:5). Women can affect lives with the compassion of Jesus as they minister to those who are hurting and damaged or who simply need to hear about Jesus.

Mission

We have married, single and divorced women working in abject poverty and giving up home comforts to work among orphans in Uganda and Burundi, and street children in Brazil and Mozambique. We have women working in schools and hospitals in Uganda, both old and young, married, single and divorced. India, Kazakstan, Bosnia and many other places have all received teams where women have played a significant part. For those with home commitments, many have gone on short-term teams involved in preaching, evangelism, women's and children's work and medical work.

Spiritual Warfare

Judges 4:21 recounts the gruesome story of Jael who killed Sisera by hammering a tent peg through his skull! Some women can be mighty warriors!

Lizzy, a divorcee, was on a trip to Sweden with a very talented musical team. She wondered what she could do as the group played in the town square. As she wandered across the square she knew her place – she was to

battle in the heavenlies! As the rest of the team sang and preached, she wandered round ‘with a sword in her hand’ and did warfare over the town.

Deborah led her people into battle (Judges 4:10) along with Barak, who clearly relied on her being there. Warfare situations are not for everyone; but there are powerful female warriors who need to be used in battle situations alongside the male warriors.

Intercession

Sarah Nyathi from Bulawayo writes: “Zimbabwe is experiencing the darkness referred to in Isaiah 60:2. But a spirit of prayer and intercession is being birthed among the ladies here. Women are realising that the hope and salvation for their families, the church and the nation, lies in God.”

The women in Bulawayo are responding to their national crisis by meeting in groups to pray for their land. Large numbers of women are being saved and cared for, including many who are widowed due to AIDS. Some older women have been interceding for 25 years and they are now training younger women in the ministry of intercession.

The Business World

Proverbs 31 illustrates the many opportunities for women to be involved in varying aspects of life. This lady was a homemaker, a family woman, industrious and creative. She also purchased property (v16), handled finances and invested her profits into a further business. She developed her own home industry (v24), selling her goods to other vendors. All this is ‘ministry’, yet is often excluded in our thinking.

A modern-day example of the ‘Proverbs 31 Woman’ is my friend in Sweden who looks after her beautiful home, has brought up a family of four, weaves her own tablecloths and curtains, keeps bees and sells honey, and is now developing a leather industry. She sometimes helps lead worship and is indeed ‘industrious’. These are the talents God has invested in her and she is a blessing to many as she tirelessly produces her wares.

From lawyer to manager of a tea shop, it may be that your calling and ministry lies in the business world. Wherever you are, if God has placed you there, you will have an effect, you will be salt and light.

Evangelism

The woman of Samaria found it natural to tell others about her encounter with Jesus (John 4) and some women find that, wherever they are, their joy is to talk about Jesus. With a gift of communication we have a head start! Linked with hospitality, this is an open door for evangelists to minister. The opportunities we have of talking to others at work, inviting neighbours for coffee, or even chatting at the school gate, give us many opportunities to fulfil the evangelistic call on our lives.

Hospitality

We are encouraged to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet 4:9). Although we probably all practise hospitality, some have a special gifting in this area. “Hospitality is the practice of welcoming, sheltering and feeding – with no thought of personal gain – those who come to your door.” (*Women's Study Bible*) Although I enjoy beautiful homes and lavish food, the essence of hospitality is not in things, but in sharing what we have willingly and with a heart of love. I have appreciated the ease with which women have ministered through their homes and their tireless service when I have been weary or needed to sit down and pour out my heart.

One such time was when Dave was away, the children were small and I was tired. After having us for Sunday lunch, Sue took us out for a walk. On returning she insisted I curled up in her warm bed (having had the electric blanket on while we were out) and tucked me up with a cup of tea while she entertained the children. To me, this epitomises the gift of hospitality.

Political and Social Arenas

Esther found herself the central figure of a national crisis. Everything hinged on her as she developed a strategy for saving her people (Esther 8). Deborah judged all Israel and led a general into a victorious battle (Jdg 4).

Moses' mother defied Pharaoh and ingeniously saved her son (Exodus 2) who eventually led her people out of slavery. Rahab sheltered two spies, saving her family, gaining a reputation as a woman of faith (Heb 11:31) and finding a place in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1).

Historically certain women have impacted society in significant ways. Although this area will be for a minority, how we need those women to rise up! Claire gave up a promising career in Whitehall to work for 'CARE' and is interfacing with politicians on a weekly basis. Although her job is extremely challenging, even daunting at times, there is a real sense that here is a woman called by God and functioning in a strategic place. She is on the front line and will be even more so as her influence grows.

Ministry to the Poor

The woman in Proverbs 31 extended her hand to the poor (v20). There are many opportunities for caring for the poor both at home and abroad. As Cally Cameron goes to Brazil to work with street children she will face the pain and suffering as she shares in the poverty around her. As my friend Becky helps in the reception of a local hostel for the homeless, she can sometimes feel unsafe, yet she repeatedly sacrifices her feelings. Not comfortable ministries – but open to us!

Practical Serving

The list here is endless, the opportunities limitless. Pat 'deacons' the 'Jubilees' (our over 60's group) by organising their meetings, taking them shopping, visiting them in hospital and taking them on holiday. Diane and Anne help with administration and finances. Gina organises conferences and administrates Salt and Light. There are receptionists in our church offices making the casual caller feel welcome and answering endless questions. There is an old saying, "Behind every good man, there's a good woman!" Much of the work done behind the scenes holds us all together! Those of you who are natural servers and administrators can sometimes become discouraged; but your Father sees what you do and will reward you! Your ministry is such a valuable one.

Creativity

In Exodus 35:30 we read of Bezalel who was “filled with the spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.” Creativity is not an ‘optional extra’ in life, but an expression of God himself. Design, embroidery, crafts, interior design, presentation etc., all affect our lives and reflect something of who we are.

Anna runs her own graphic design business and has served the church by producing designs, logos and brochures. A group of women took on the responsibility for the interior design of our school and prayer room and others have run creative seminars for non-Christian friends. Other women have produced beautiful banners for their meetings.

Perhaps we should ask for more creative anointing from the Holy Spirit to express more of the creativity of God. Those who are creative, look to develop and express the wonders of God in artistic ways.

Prophecy

Prophecy is a ministry clearly open to women. Anna was a prophetess (Luke 2:36) as were Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Miriam (Ex 15:20). Huldah spoke and taught the word of the Lord (2 Kings 22:14-20) and Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9).

The Holy Spirit was poured out on *all* flesh. “I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons *and daughters* will prophesy” (Acts 2:17). The women were not excluded!

How High ... ?

With so many doors open to us, the only question, surely, is not “What can we do?”, but “How high do you want to go?” With God, the sky really is the limit! As doors are opened to us, let us aim for the very highest that we can!

Chapter 9

And Finally ...

Releasing ‘God’s frozen assets’ in our churches will not happen instantly. There will inevitably be a process of recognising gifts and ministries, praying for God to bring about opportunities, and a willingness on the part of all of us to move forward. But it is the men, I believe, who hold the keys.

The Men hold the Keys

Men in any form of government or headship (whether that be as husbands, leaders or elders) inevitably hold the keys to releasing women into ministry. If women are submissive and acknowledge male headship, then the responsibility for releasing them into their God-given function inevitably lies with the men. The question is: will the men exercise that headship and responsibility?

There are, it seems to me, two main keys that can open the doors in this area.

1. The Key of Invitation

My husband Dave has constantly drawn me to work alongside him and has given me opportunities to function, make mistakes and grow. At times I have felt inadequate for the task, and at other times I could hardly muster the will because I have felt he would do a much better job. Although he has never forced me, he has nudged me into many challenges. *I am a product of his discipleship.* He has vision for my life and has often turned the ‘key of

invitation' to get me functioning. Women will generally be reluctant to push themselves forward, and will await an invitation to be more involved. It is the men who are in a place to issue that invitation, and those women who are already involved in some ministry.

2. The Key of Encouragement

Women need a lot of encouragement! It is common for a woman to be negative about herself and slip into feelings of inadequacy rather than confidence. In a recent survey taken amongst Salt and Light churches, 59% of women identified 'feelings of inadequacy and fear' as the main hindrance to their moving out in ministry.

As women minister, they will need much encouragement to enable them to continue to move forward. Many will feel they are not doing a good job and will be self-critical. An affirming word is not an optional extra; it is far more. It is the fuel needed to continue. Of course, our approval and self-worth is ultimately found in God; but if we are functioning as 'helper' and 'co-worker', we need to know we are in tandem with the men. Encouragement harnessed with training is a key to release.

The goal is not independent ministry, but working alongside the men, fulfilling our God-given destiny so that at the end of our time, we can look the Master in the face and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

To both men and women this is a challenge. Our churches are full of untapped resources. Are we prepared to work *together* to release workers into the vineyard? Are we prepared to give ourselves afresh to releasing 'God's frozen assets'?

