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GOD'S DONKEY



Peter Newman

The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walk'd
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tatter'd outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour,
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

G. K. Chesterton

Preface

It has been my privilege to compile the manuscripts from the original tapes, and so have the benefit of the Evangelist's voice as he relives the experiences of his life. For Peter Newman is a preacher rather than a writer, and there is a warmth of feeling and sincerity more easily conveyed by voice than the written word.

There is one incident which Peter has not recorded, and I am going to include it here.

During his experiences in the East, Peter heard of a mystic who had lived in a cave in the desert for a number of years. He was not far away so a visit was made to meet this "holy man".

On arrival he stood a little way off from the entrance of the cave while an adherent sitting guard disappeared into the darkness to bring him out. Peter waited with mixed feelings of trepidation and anticipation, wondering what holy utterances would fall on his ears. Would there be wisdom, knowledge, direction or revelation?

The "holy man" emerged from the depths within, came right to where Peter stood, almost touched him as he bent forward and said, "Have you got a cigarette?".

The reader of this book may come with hopeful expectancy and not be disappointed. It is a human book of Faith that builds up Faith. It is a book of inspiration that encourages a deeper and more abandoned walk with God. It is a human book about a human being who exemplifies all that Salvation can bring to the human soul.

Myrtle Shepherd

Introduction

Today as I look back at my life, I marvel at the hand of God, lifting me from the slopes of destruction to the heavenly steps of God. The miracles He has worked in me and for me make me feel very humble. I want to bear testimony to over fifty years of God's faithfulness and answered prayer.

These glimpses through the years are a true picture of my background and my life as an evangelist. There are good times and bad times, funny times and sad times. They are set down to encourage those who are already in the call of God and to inspire those who are seeking God. They are to state that "God is God" and that when He declares in the Bible that He will never leave you nor forsake you, He means it. I want to show that from my experience.

You will see things that should never happen to an evangelist and that an evangelist should never do. Yet there is the unrelenting call to be an evangelist, with all that such a calling entails.

It is a great and dangerous calling, for the evangelist is marching into enemy territory. He needs to be surrounded by the prayers and love of the church. It is when I have not had this prayer support that things have sometimes gone wrong for me.

When in trouble the evangelist can so often hit the headlines because he has had to make himself known. The publicity which has brought the crowds to the meetings will just as readily be used against him by the media if something goes wrong.

The preaching of the gospel may rouse anger and emotion in people and in demons. The evangelist may be labelled exhibitionist or big-headed, ridiculed as a figure of fun.

He has the task of bringing people to himself in order that he may then bring them to Jesus. When Peter and John went up to the Temple Gate they said to the man begging there, "Look on us," and having gained his attention they exhibited the power of Jesus.

The dictionary describes the evangelist as, "One who sets out to preach the gospel, to evangelise, to make known the Good News. To preach the gospel from place to place." It also says that, "An evangelist is an assistant to an apostle, authorised to preach but without a fixed charge."

And that raises two questions: who authorised me to preach and gave me my credentials, and who supports me and my family? I trust you will find the answers in the pages that follow.

Peter Newman



God's Donkey

I'm a donkey, God's donkey. Most of the time I want to be a racehorse, going, doing and daring for God. I want to preach to thousands, have a world-wide known ministry, evangelize in tents which have ten poles instead of two. I want everyone to know that I'm Peter Newman, God's servant, God's man for the day.

The donkey isn't a particularly attractive animal. He doesn't tell his rider where he should be going. He's only the vehicle. The donkey has no say in his own destiny he is merely obedient to his rider. In countries like Israel, donkeys are so commonplace that people hardly notice them. It's the person sitting on his back they look at.

When Jesus first told me that he wanted to ride on my back like He rode on the back of the ass's colt going into Jerusalem, I was offended.

"People won't see you, Peter," the Lord said to me. "They will see Me instead."

"That's all very well, Lord," I argued. "But what about me?" Now I knew in theory that I was only a vessel designed to carry a very precious treasure and I knew, like John the Baptist, that I had to decrease so that Jesus within me could increase. My mind knew it all and accepted it all, but my pride thought that it was too much to ask.

I've found it far from easy to become the donkey God told me to be. I've kicked against the pricks. I've sulked, fought, objected, wrestled, and then, when I've eventually come to my senses, I've given in.

I used to get discouraged when reading Christian testimony books. They all seemed to be written by such perfect people who, once they were saved, never did anything wrong, never failed God, never stumbled or fell. I've done all of these things, and one truth I've

discovered is that God is bigger than our mistakes. I should have known that from reading the Bible. Didn't Moses, the great deliverer, once kill an Egyptian and flee into the back of beyond? And wasn't it there that God dealt with his wilfulness and brought him out as pure gold?

So my story, then, isn't one of a shining, successful Christian who never has doubts, fears or misgivings. But it is one about God's very gracious dealings with an ordinary human being. I like to think that it's a story of hope and assurance that he who has started a good work in a man will see it through until the day of Jesus Christ.



God Makes His Own Arrangements

I picked up the phone to check with the airport. I had barely lifted it to my ear when that inner impression I now know to be the voice of God spoke to me again: "I've told you the date to go. You are to leave the house tonight to catch the plane early tomorrow."

Didn't God know there was a twenty-four hour strike at Heathrow Airport and no planes were either taking off or landing?

My wife, Barbara, came into the room. "There's no point in even trying," she said as I put the phone down again. "You're only going to have a wasted journey to the airport and a wasted day tomorrow."

My youngest daughter Sharon also chimed in with the latest news bulletin. "Grounded for the next twenty-four hours," she declared, with a glint in her eye. Perhaps God or Dad had made a mistake this time.

"But I've got to go. God has told me to and that means my flight will be all right." Barbara was silent for a moment. Then she nodded and started fussing over my cases, making sure everything was there. I got my coat, picked up my luggage, kissed her goodbye and headed off for the train which would take me into London.

I hadn't booked a seat on the plane, whenever God tells me to fly here or there, I just turn up at the airport and get a stand-by ticket. But I didn't expect the queue at the airline office to be as long as it was that morning.

It was chaotic. There were between two hundred and fifty and three hundred tired and irate people waiting. The man in front of me had a transistor radio and was relaying the latest news about the airport

strike to one and all.

"Where are you hoping to go?" he asked glumly.

"Chicago," I replied confidently.

"You must have a ticket."

"No, stand-by," I replied.

He started to laugh and said I didn't stand a chance of getting anywhere near Chicago. Others stared at me and winked at one another; at least they had tickets to their destination. I just held my tongue and waited. My turn eventually came. I asked for stand-by to Chicago. The clerk looked oddly at me, hesitated and demanded passport and money. I had my ticket.

The whole section was packed with people. To get to the phone to ring Barbara I had to climb over bodies, suitcases and flight bags. Everyone was fed up with waiting for flights which, according to the latest reports, would never take off.

I dialled Plymouth. "Hello, Barbara," I said. "I'm at the airport. I've got my ticket and I'll be flying within the next couple of hours."

"Oh," she said. "Is the strike over then?"

"No," I replied, "but I'll ring you from America. Bye, dear."

I headed for the departure lounge which was almost empty. The information board said that all transatlantic flights were cancelled until further notice. I sat down and waited for some information about my flight to flicker on the electronic board. I can't say I was bursting with faith. All I knew was that God had told me to catch a plane to America and that God makes His own arrangements in spite of man.

I glanced up and, sure enough, details of my flight were coming up on the board. It was leaving as scheduled. I said a quick "Thank you, Lord", grabbed my belongings and headed off to the assigned gate. But I wasn't home and dry yet.

"There's very little chance of your getting on with only a stand-by ticket," the official told me. "Go over there and wait while everyone else gets on board."

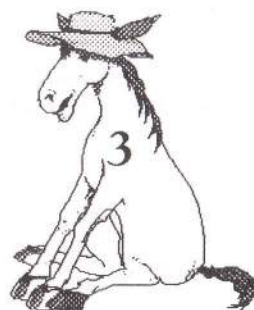
I joined the two other stand-by ticket holders and we sat and waited, and waited.

What seemed like an age later, the official called us over and told us we could board. I expected the jet to be full, but it was almost empty. I smiled to myself. "Thank you, Lord," I repeated as I lay across three empty seats and went to sleep.

A few hours later the pilot's voice came over the intercom. He apologised because we would be one minute late arriving in Chicago.

Then he told us that ours was the only transatlantic flight to have left Heathrow on time that day.

I lay back. "How good God is," I thought. And I started thinking about God's wonderful faithfulness to me over the years; even from the earliest years.



"A Thief I'll Be"

My Grandad used to be a drunkard. People would make up songs about old Wally Newman who could be seen staggering along the streets of London, night after night after night.

He wasn't a down and out; he had a good business brain even though it was in a state of pickled animated suspension most of the time! No, Grandad owned coffee stalls. He paid men to dish up the brew while he quietly got sozzled on the profits.

His life was dramatically changed the night he walked past a mission hall somewhere in the East End. There was something very different about the singing which drifted through the half-open windows. Now old Wally Newman loved a good sing, so in he went, in his usual drunken state, to see what was going on.

He had barely pushed open the doors when he had a vision of Jesus. He broke down, cried and was instantly converted. He stayed for the rest of the service and then went post haste to the Embankment to tell his mates what had happened to him. And he didn't just tell them the once. Day after day he would go to his old haunts and tell his former drinking pals of the Christ who had cleaned up his life and given him a brand new start. Many of them used to sit and weep with him as he told them of the day he met Jesus. Grandmother, however, wasn't quite so touched by her Wally's experience. She couldn't deny the change in him, but she liked a bit of fun herself and she didn't go in for "all that religious stuff".

My two sisters and I went to live with my grandparents when we

were very small, our own mother having abandoned us when I was only eighteen months old. By this time the converted Wally Newman had a small cottage, called Kosicot, in the countryside. I never knew my mother, but my father worked in a nearby town and would come and visit us quite often.

Every night Grandad would say prayers with us, and I will always remember him lining us all up in the garden to teach us the choruses he loved so much. He called Sunday "the Sabbath" and we all had to be on our best behaviour from getting up to going to bed. The Sabbath was always the longest day of the week.

He would often go out preaching at local chapels and churches. The minute he was out of sight at the lane end, Grandmother would wind up the old gramophone and dance on the lawn, beckoning all of us to join in her forbidden revelries. "Now don't you go telling Grandad what we're up to," she would say with a twinkle in her eye. "This is our little secret." We'd all nod solemnly and then carry on enjoying ourselves. Grandad never found out about our little games because everything would be back to its usual sober self by the time he walked up the garden path, Bible in hand.

Those were happy days, but storm clouds were gathering. Everyone seemed quite pleased when Dad brought this woman to Kosicot to meet Daphne, Clare and me. She seemed quite pleasant and not too many weeks had passed before Dad decided he wanted to marry her. That decision meant a great change in our lives: we kids were going to live with the newly-weds in a big house in town. The prospect of life in town appealed to my eight-year-old mind. We were going to be a real family again; surely life was going to be even better than it had been at Kosicot.

I was in for a rude awakening. My step-mother would have much preferred to build her new life without Dad's three children hanging round her feet. Children to her meant dirt, expense and inconvenience, and she was quick to show her dislike for us. I don't know if my father ever realised how unhappy and insecure we felt. He loved her and I often wondered if he just conveniently turned a blind eye to our unhappiness. With our grandparents we had known kindly discipline and love. We lived for our grandmother's visits. But then,

for some unknown reason, Grandmother was not allowed to come to the house. Once a week though, we used to meet her secretly when she was in town shopping.

I remember the house was like a palace, but never like a home. The only time we were allowed in it was for food and bed. We never knew what it was like to sit by the fire or to play indoors. Meal times were frightening: to drop a crumb was to invoke harsh punishment. Our house gleamed and shone with wax polish. A finger mark was a crime. Other people noticed our unhappiness and would invite us into their houses, but we always had to return home. I sometimes had to be escorted back because I was so afraid. Occasionally neighbours talked of reporting our treatment to the authorities, but nobody got round to doing anything.

As we weren't allowed to spend much time in the house itself, I made the garden shed my second home, or rather, my real and only home. I remember spending hour after hour shut away in my own little world reading anything I could lay my hands on. The real world didn't seem to offer very much so I compensated by immersing myself in books, hundreds of them. My shed was packed with biographies, autobiographies, classics, and "Penny Dreadfuls", as the cheap novel used to be called.

I stayed out of my step-mother's way as much as I could, but she was always accusing me of some misdeed or other. I was regularly punished for crimes I'd never committed. I used to spend hours dreaming about the day I would escape from that house and all its misery, but I knew I would have to wait until I was a bit older to make the break. Eight was, after all, a little young.

The same ambition burned within my sisters. When I was ten, Clare ran away and never returned. She was given a home with a farming family and lived happily ever after. "Lucky thing", I thought. Daphne was next to escape. She went into service at fourteen to get away from the house, leaving me lonelier than I'd ever been in all my life. By this time I had two step-sisters and their lot seemed much better than mine. I'd long since stopped praying. I reasoned out that if God allowed me to be so unhappy and miserable, He couldn't be

the nice, kind person Grandad had said He was. So I couldn't see much point in even trying to talk to him.

The highlight of my week was Saturday when a local farmer used to pay me to do odd jobs round his farm. I loved the countryside and I loved earning a bit of cash, even though all of it had to be ceremoniously handed over to my step-mother each week. In return she would give me a few pence back and I'd spend it on the luxuries of life, like sweets and books. One Saturday I'd worked especially hard and the farmer gave me a bit of extra money which I kept for myself. I remember hiding it away in my shed, taking it out every now and again to look at it. But my secret didn't stay hidden away for long. My step-mother unearthed my little treasure, assumed that I'd stolen it, and told everyone that I was a thief.

"Right," I said to myself, fighting back the tears, "if she says I'm a thief, then a thief I'll be." And I started stealing things from school. I was never discovered and I soon became a dab-hand at relieving both teacher and pupils of whatever I fancied.

My dishonest actions were temporarily halted when I had an accident in the schoolyard and broke my leg. I remember the headmaster sending for my step-mother and then driving us both home. He assumed that she would make sure my leg received medical attention. It got some attention all right, but not the sort it needed. She was so angry at this disruption of her daily routine that she beat me across the leg. To this day I can remember the pain of that thrashing.

Whenever I complained that my leg hurt and that I couldn't walk on it, she would hit me again. I don't know what my father was thinking or doing during this time, but he certainly didn't do anything to help me. I remember trying to walk to school. My leg was swollen up like a balloon and I used to drag it painfully behind me.

One day a lady came out of her home to ask me what was wrong. I just said that I'd sprained my ankle. She was quite horrified. She took me into her home and called the doctor who came and treated me. While we were waiting for him to arrive, she told me that she lived with her sister and that both of them were nurses. "We hold a Bible

class in our home every week. If you'd care to come along you'd be very welcome," she told me. How could I refuse her offer when she'd shown me such kindness?

My step-mother didn't mind my going to the class, after all, if I was in someone else's home then hers couldn't be messed up. So I became a regular attender and I was soon enthralled by the Bible stories I heard there. Joshua particularly appealed to me; and the fact that twelve tribes of Israel left twelve stones to mark their crossing over the river Jordan impressed me no end.

"Miss," I called out enthusiastically, "if those stones are still there I'm going to see them one day." And see them I did: thirty years later I stood at the place where those stones were laid.

I later met my Bible teacher and we had a good laugh when I told her that my childlike words of prophecy had been fulfilled!

Things at home weren't getting any better and I was still deeply unhappy. Even the joys of the Bible class couldn't compensate for the following six days. So I decided to run away, never, ever to return.

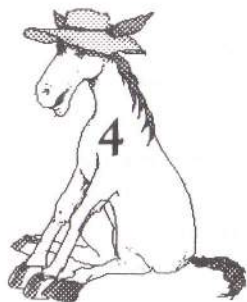
And run away I did. I slept a couple of nights in barns and then made my way to another town not many miles from where I lived. Once there I headed for the railway station, determined to hop on the first train which pulled in. A curious porter, however, had other ideas. I suppose I must have looked a bit suspicious. After all, pint sized eleven-year-olds don't usually hang around station platforms in the middle of the night.

He called in the police. The officer who questioned me seemed to tower over me from a very great height. I was cold, tired, hungry and the copper seemed to feel a bit sorry for me. I remember him taking me to the police station and giving me a cup of piping hot cocoa. They didn't quite know what to do with me, but the policeman who had "arrested" me said that as he was going off duty he would take me to his home then contact my parents the following day.

So off we went. His home was lovely; I remember thinking how cosy it was, and lived-in. His wife didn't bat an eye-lid when she saw me; it seemed the most natural thing in the world that her husband should bring a young visitor back in the middle of the night. She

made me some supper, and as they talked to me I discovered they were both Christians. They asked me questions about myself and about my home life, and they read something out of the Bible and prayed with me. Then they took me up to bed, and as I drifted off to sleep I longed to stay in that warm house for ever and ever.

Morning dawned, and with it the awful knowledge that I'd be going back to that big old house to face my step-mother. Someone must have been praying, though, because she didn't give me the hiding I was expecting.



A Menace To Society

Within days I was off again; this time steering clear of towns and policemen. I took to the open road and slept in barns. I can't remember being afraid of the countryside at night; I was just glad to be away from my step-mother and that big old house.

The barns were a good place to stay. Early each morning the farm workers would arrive and hang up their food bags before going out into the fields. I would peer over the tops of the hay bales and when the last one had gone outside to do his daily work, I would swing down from the loft and tuck into my breakfast. The wives of those men will never know how much I appreciated their cheese sandwiches, cakes and biscuits. To a hungry eleven-year-old, they were like manna from heaven. I wonder who got the blame when the workers discovered their lunches were missing?

If it rained really hard and there wasn't a nearby shed or barn to shelter in, I would make a den in a ditch and cover it over with branches, leaves and grass. Imagine my horror one day when a stranger in an army uniform unearthed my crouched body from my hideaway. Visions of police stations and endless questions flashed through my mind but the army sergeant didn't hand me over to the authorities. Instead he smuggled me into a nearby German prisoner-of-war camp. So I became a German prisoner of war.

For several days he brought me food and tea, and an officer soon discovered my existence and, almost before I knew it, I was back with my grandparents at Kosicot. By then I was rebellious and insolent and even Grandad despaired of me. During the day I would sneak onto a nearby American airbase and steal whatever I could get my hands on. Life at Kosicot was boring after my travels on the open road and I couldn't stomach all that religious stuff from my grandad.

Those happy Bible class days were a long way off - I was different now and didn't need all that soppy stuff. After a few weeks I grabbed a handful of biscuits and headed off into the countryside again.

I had a wonderful sense of freedom as I sauntered up and down the country lanes. I was my own boss, answerable to no one. Sometimes, for fun, I would steal some penny bangers and go off into the woods at night to let them off. Soon gamekeepers and police would be hunting for the "poacher". I used to run for miles with them all in hot pursuit. When I had had enough fun from my game I used to duck out of the woods, leaving my pursuers chasing shadows. Later on I would turn up at the gamekeeper's cottage, waking him up in the middle of the night by bouncing stones off his corrugated roof. The dogs would bark, and in no time at all the lights would come on, but I was gone.

I could eat when I wanted to, providing some farmworker had left his lunch within reach. Pheasant, chicken and rabbit were often on my menu. I slept where and when I chose. It felt good to be free. I became an artist at relieving people of their goods. I enjoyed the thrill of not only eating and stealing but of being hunted as well.

I decided one night to make a ditch my bedroom so I borrowed a haybale from a local farmer and covered it with some leafy branches. I'd just finished my home when the heavens opened and it started to bucket down. I was happily whiling away the time when suddenly I heard voices. I looked up and saw two pairs of eyes staring at me. I was terrified but determined not to show it.

"What are you doing here, m'lad?" said one of the men who were peering so intently at me. I gave him a mouthful of colourful abuse and told him to mind his own business. My tongue always thought it lived inside a fourteen stone hulk of a body.

"We aren't coming to do you any harm," said the other man. "We've been keeping an eye on you over the past few days and we thought we could help you. We weren't thinking of turning you over to the police."

I was curious, to say the least.

"So who are you, then?" I asked. "Gypsies, that's what we are," said one of them with a laugh. "Come with us and see our caravan."

"Have you got a horse, as well?" I asked, fascinated at the thought of a real gypsy caravan.

"Yeah, we got a horse," said the other man. "Come on with us and we'll show you."

I needed no further persuasion. We walked through the dark

countryside until we came to a clearing. As I was looking round one of the men suggested that I stay with them for a while. They slung some canvas under one of the caravans and made me a hammock.

I soon adapted to their gypsy lifestyle and they taught me many things. I stayed with them for a few months and then joined up with some others.

I still continued to steal, and when I was fifteen the gypsies held a meeting to decide what should be done with me. They knew that my bravado often exceeded my common sense and it was just a matter of time before the police would catch me red-handed. And if they caught me, they would doubtless start uncovering a few of the gypsies' illegal activities. I was too big a risk and the gypsies told me I had to leave. I was a bit angry about their decision but I decided that it was their loss, not mine, and off I went.

At sixteen I was again in trouble. This time I had to appear at the local magistrates' court. To my amazement a minister appealed to the court on my behalf. He must have made an impression because I was only given probation.

It turned out the the minister felt it was his mission to lead me to higher ground. He took me for a meal and told me that I was being prayed for. I thought that was a cheek: I didn't want older people taking over my life. After the meal he took me home with him. When his wife saw me there was an unholy row. She declared that if I stayed, then she'd go. While they were arguing I decided to settle the affair and leave, with the minister's overcoat under my arm.

School for me was one long punishment. I was dressed in the most weird home-made clothes and was considered a joke by most of the other children. I loved to learn and was once punished for asking too many questions. When I was given the chance of sitting the grammar school entrance exam, I took home extra homework, but it was made quite plain to me that lack of money would prevent me from ever going to a grammar school. So I rebelled again. I stopped doing homework and decided to quit school altogether. I was beaten, taken to the local police station and locked up for the day. This was to frighten me, but it only served to turn me into a hero in the eyes of the other children. I preferred to be in prison than to submit to the school system.

For quite some time I had been remembering Grandad's tales about life in London, and when I was sixteen I headed for the city to see if I could make a decent living for myself. Grandad had often talked about all the rich nobs in the West End, so surely any self-

respecting thief should be able to nick a few pounds a day to keep body and soul together.

Life in London scared me a bit at first. Everything seemed to move so fast and while I was familiar with hedgerows and barns, all those tall, rather stately buildings seemed to crowd in on me. But I didn't intend to be licked: London wasn't going to intimidate, Peter Newman.

Soho fascinated me. I used to spend hours watching the people on its bustling streets. I soon discovered who would buy what from me and so I started a new chapter in my life of crime. Before long I had a lucrative little business under way, with the profits mostly going on drink. The police were more formidable than the ones in the quiet country towns and villages and so I was wise enough to wait until dark before I broke into offices and flats. Most of the day was spent sleeping wherever I could find a place to lay my head.

London opened my eyes to crime in a new way. One thing I quickly learned was that one couldn't be a one man band. Crime was controlled from one area to another and there wasn't any chance of operating in an area without the sanction of the "Boss". It was difficult to work out who the "Boss" was, and just to make things more difficult, some areas had more than one. Rivalry between gangs for the possession of a "patch" was fierce and often dangerous. Once you were involved with a gang it was for good. There was no way out.

I was vetted by many gangs, but somehow managed to stay out of full commitment. I became a minder, protecting prostitutes working in certain areas and took my money from their earnings. This was a highly risky occupation - you were in danger from the law on one hand and rival gangs on the other. In my day the gangs were highly organised. Gang members were mostly foreigners from Mediterranean countries and to tread on their toes meant death! My life became a game of hide and seek. I was a good hustler. People began to take notice of me. But it was taking its toll on my life. Drink and drugs, uppers and downers made me nervous and jumpy. One day I did a very sensible thing: without telling anybody I disappeared into the country. I knew too much to get permission, so I just left, for the quiet life.

I left on the spur of the moment without any thought about my destination. I boarded a train at King's Cross without a ticket and left the rest to British Rail. The journey turned out to be a short one at a place called Sandy. Somehow I had to leave the station without being caught. A glance around soon had me scrambling up an

embankment just outside the station. I disappeared into the night, catching the sound of two men shouting, whom I could just see to be a porter and a policeman.

I was off again, this time to the Home Counties, East Anglia, The Midlands, and finally to the North West of England.

Eventually I found myself back in court. The judge found me guilty of stealing sixpence (two and a half new pence) and I was sent to prison to await sentence. One night I was taken before the Governor of the prison. This was very unusual and I noticed that all the customary formalities were done away with. I was invited to sit down and offered a cigarette, which I quickly took. I was very suspicious but it turned out that the governor was compiling a report for the courts and only wanted to help me. However, I wasn't going to have his help and I told him so.

The day before I was sentenced I was handed a sheet of paper. What I read was my life story, from four years to twenty-two. It wasn't very nice reading. I felt confused and angry that so much could be known about me. None of it was good, but what really stunned me was the last paragraph which read something like this:

This man has refused any help of rehabilitation and there seems no chance that he will ever fit into society. His anti-social behaviour makes him a menace to society. It is recommended that he be locked away for the protection of others and their property.

The courtroom listened patiently as my solicitor did his best to jerk a few tears from one and all. Then he sat down and the judge started to speak: "If you are hoping to save this man from going to prison, you may like to know that I have no intention of sending him there. Peter Newman, you will be fined £25. But let me give you this warning. If you appear before any court again you will be imprisoned for at least four years."

I could hardly take in what he was saying. My heart was pounding so loudly that I was sure everyone in the court could hear it.

"Next case," the judge called out. "You are free to go, Mr Newman."

Free to go! The words spun round in my mind. I was out of that courtroom like a scalded cat. This called for a celebration, so I bought as much drink as I could afford and spent three whole glorious days in total oblivion. World War Three could have started and I wouldn't have known a thing about it. I was happily blind drunk. On the third night of my celebrations a police officer found me sitting in someone else's car singing at the top of my voice. He dragged me onto the road

and ordered me to leave town there and then, otherwise I'd be locked up and face court charges for drunkenness. I took his advice and wobbled down the main road which led out of town.

I became a wanderer again. The judge's words were still ringing in my ears and I knew I couldn't return to my life of crime, so I turned to a life of drink instead. Being smashed out of my mind was quite good fun and it wasn't a criminal offence, so I took up my new alcoholic profession with gusto.

I decided to head back to London. Grandad had enjoyed a drunken existence on the Embankment and I decided to do the same. After a couple of weeks I looked like a tramp. My trousers and jacket were dirty and smelly, my shirt collar was black, my muddy shoes were down-at-heel and my face was covered in unshaven stubble. I must have looked twice my age, but I didn't care. When you lose your self-respect, you lose the ability to care. As the days turned to weeks, I lost everything except my desire for drink. I slept on newspapers like the other alcoholics on the Embankment. We seldom ate. What was the point of buying food when you could afford a bottle of methylated spirits and forget about the world? I was only twenty-two but it felt like seventy-two.

I was also a heavy smoker. Cigarettes cost money, so I started picking up dog-ends from the pavements and rummaging in litterbins to see if someone had accidentally thrown a whole cigarette away inside a packet. I used to put all my finds into a tin, scuttle on to a seat, tip out the tobacco and roll myself a smoke.

My existence wasn't an unhappy one. For most of the time I didn't have a care in the world and I was more than happy to be drunk for as many hours of the day as I could afford. People on the Embankment called me "Laughing Peter" because I was always happy and joking. I would do anything for a drink: I've often danced and sung in a pub for the price of a short.

But occasionally I would surface to reality and see myself as I really was: a dirty good-for-nothing, living from one drink to the next. Then I would bang my head against a wall in sheer frustration and bewilderment. "Where are you going, Peter?" was the question that span around inside my head.

And I would reply: "Nowhere."

During that period I shuffled into several Salvation Army hostels where I saw men supposedly make a commitment to God. "They're only doing it for a bed," I used to think. I preferred to sleep rough.



A Brand-New "New-Man"

I ended up in Manchester having hitch-hiked there from London. Little did I realize as the miles sped past, that the old Peter Newman was travelling to his death. I was to meet God in Manchester.

I've talked to a lot of people who have met God for themselves, and many have told me that, at different times in their lives, they have felt His presence. I hadn't told anybody, but I had too. I remember when I was a little boy in Sunday School. I wasn't allowed into the main hall but was taken upstairs where a man was on his knees crying and praying for me. I felt God in that room.

Then there was the fairground in Luton. I was working on the rides when suddenly I could hear the Salvation Army Band playing. I jumped off the Waltzer so that I could listen to the music that was drifting across the field. There was a warm, wonderful presence around me. I felt daft because I knew that I wanted to pray. Tears came into my eyes. I told the gaffer I was nipping off for five minutes and I ran across the field to where the band was playing. I followed them down the hill, rounded the corner with them; then dived into the first pub I came to. Try as I might I couldn't understand the peculiar feelings which had so gripped me.

Then there was the old Army Scripture reader in Benghazi who waited for me to return drunk to the barracks every night. I used to stagger into his room on his arm and he would help me sit down and get me to sing "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah" with him. I was drunk, but he was serious. I didn't ever let on to that old man, but every now and then, drunk though I was, I would feel that intangible Presence.

And here I was in Manchester, looking every inch a tramp, about to meet God properly at last. I knew there was a Salvation Army hostel

in Francis Street and I made straight for it. Time and need had eroded my principles about staying in hostels. I was glad of any free hand-outs I could get, no matter what the source. Just as long as those too-good-to-be-true officers didn't start going on about the Lord and God and all that, I was quite happy to borrow one of their beds and wash the taste out of my mouth with some "Sally Bash" tea.

Once installed in the hostel, I settled into my usual drinking routine. The nickname of "Laughing Peter" wasn't particularly applicable at that time. I was starting to get really fed up with my alcoholic, filthy lifestyle and I'd long since been feeling that there had to be something else to life other than dog ends and booze. But what? I sat and chatted to one of the hostel officers one day and asked him if joining the Salvation Army would make me any different.

"No," he said, and I was shocked at his answer. Why then, I wondered, had they all shouted "come and join us" so often and so long, if it wasn't going to change people? He must have seen my amazement because he looked at me and said: "Peter, the only thing that could ever change you and your life is a person-to-person meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ."

My hackles rose straight away. Which Christ would want to meet me person-to-person? I was dirty, smelly and had nothing to offer. Oh, it was all right for the young Army officer: he was all bright and shining and clean. So I retaliated in the best way I knew how; I swore loudly at him and told him where he could stuff his religion. He was persistent though and insisted that I should pray. I knew that the only way to get out of his clutches was to let him have his way, so he prayed. Then he got me to pray after him. I didn't know what I said at the time, but like a child I said whatever he said. Then I escaped into the nearest pub.

The next day I had a strange experience: I could not leave the hostel. We had two exits and every time I went to leave there was an invisible barrier that I couldn't break through. For several hours I walked around the hostel, failing to get out. Suddenly the Army officer who had prayed with me earlier approached me and said, "Peter, do you want a job?"

To my utter amazement I heard myself reply, "Yes", and I found myself cleaning the toilets in the hostel. My opinions about men who capitulated to become workers in hostels was that they had succumbed to the lowest form of employment; thieving and even begging were higher. My views were well known in the hostel, and many a man had felt the lashing of my tongue for stooping so low.

The news soon spread. Those who thought they were in the know rumoured that my employment was just a ploy to enable me to rob the hostel.

As weeks went by I was given a cubicle to sleep in, all to myself. If you knew anything about hostel hierarchy, you'd know that that was quite an achievement.

I thought long and deep about what the officer had said to me, although I didn't tell him, and one night I decided I would have a bash at praying. It was years since I had prayed by myself and I felt a bit ridiculous even thinking about it. But now I made up my mind, just as long as no one was going to overhear.

I stood on my bed and looked over the partition into the cubicle on the left. It was empty. Then I peered over into the one on the right. That too was empty. I was so determined that no one was going to know that Peter Newman had been praying that I put a chair under the door handle as an extra precaution. Feeling absolutely foolish, I dropped to my knees. Grandad had prayed on his knees and he knew God so I felt I should do the same. I took a deep breath and announced, "God, I don't really believe You exist, but if You do, You've got to help me. You've got to stop me from drinking and, if You do, I'll serve You for the rest of my life. Amen." I stuck the last bit on the end as a kind of deal just so there would be something in it for God, if He existed, that was.

I didn't tell a soul about my little prayer session and I got on with life in the hostel. Within a few weeks they promoted me to tea-boy. It was my job to serve the morning and afternoon teas and I got a nice, white jacket to do it in. All the other lads thought I'd wangled the job so I could make off with the takings.

I was serving teas out of the giant urn one Saturday morning when I walked an old pal of mine. Once upon a time he'd been a wealthy aristocratic sort of chap, but he'd fallen on hard times. He still had a very upper-class impression of himself and always reckoned he was a cut above the other riff-raff who frequented the hostels. Well, when he saw me serving up the tea he was absolutely amazed that Peter Newman, his friend, should be doing something so low and menial. "Peter," he said to me, "how could you possibly do a job like this? Come," he said, theatrically patting his pocket, "I have money. Lots of it. Let's go out and enjoy ourselves."

At once I slipped off my white jacket and left the queue of men with their tongues hanging out for a cuppa. I was away to share my old drinking companion's good fortune, wherever it had come from.

We marched into the nearest pub and he bought me a drink. I took one mouthful and thumped it back onto the bar. "This tastes awful," I said to him and complained to the barman.

"There's nothing wrong with my beer," he said tetchily. "Go somewhere else if you don't like it." So we did, and it was the same story all over again. Try as I might, I just couldn't drink any alcohol because it tasted foul and smelled rotten. My friend, however, had no difficulty downing his liquid refreshment and, by the time we'd visited half a dozen pubs, he was showing the first signs of alcoholic merriment.

We ended up in a hotel bar where we picked up a couple of women. I was sober as a judge and the more I looked at my drunken friend, the more irritated I became. To crown it all, one of the women was making eyes at me and I wasn't in the least bit interested.

"Here, Peter," said my friend, waving a fiver dramatically under my nose, "another round, my man."

The women giggled as I obediently took the money and went to the bar to order the drinks. I picked up the tray and was returning to the cosy little drunken party when suddenly I thought, "Peter, what on earth are you doing here?" Without a word of explanation, I was off.

I felt thoroughly miserable as I walked down the road towards the hostel. Things were bad: even drink tasted revolting, so what was there left to enjoy? I started to cry with despair. Then I heard my voice saying: "God, I don't believe You exist; but if You do, You've got to help me."

Then it dawned on me. God had made the drink taste so vile. God had helped me. God really did exist. Suddenly I felt clean, and free, as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I jumped in the air, kicked my heels, then sped to the hostel. Only a few hours earlier I'd left a queue of thirsty men and headed out for a drunken binge, and here I was returning, talking excitedly about God. I ran straight towards the Major's room. I almost fell through the door with eagerness. "Major," I announced, "I know there's a God. What do I do now?"

The Major looked up from his desk, somewhat surprised. "If you know there's a God, go and read your Bible," he said.

His answer wasn't quite what I expected. "I'm not reading that rubbish," I told him.

"Go and read the Bible and pray to the God you're talking about and He will show you the truth," he said and put his head down to get on with his paperwork.

I left the room, ran up to my cubicle and rooted out the Bible which was stuffed in the back of my locker. I opened it. "God," I said, "that man downstairs said that You would speak to me from this book. So I'm asking You to do it because I don't even know where to begin reading."

I looked down to where the page was open and read these words: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

Now, that made sense to me but I didn't know who "He" was. "So You'll have to tell me, God," I said.

As I read on I discovered that "He" was Jesus, and then I came to the bit which made me leap to my feet with excitement. "He that comes to me I will in no wise cast out." That was me! Jesus accepted me, just as I was, mucky clothes and all, and He wasn't going to turn me away!

All I had in the world was a pair of Wimpey boots pinched from a building site, a pair of old grey flannels with the knees out, and a T-shirt. I didn't even have any socks or underwear to my name, but all of a sudden, I felt richer than a millionaire. I had found Him, the pearl of great price. I was His son. He had claimed me and made me His own. I can't begin to describe the joy I felt at my discovery: I felt as if I belonged to someone who cared for me deeply and that I was no longer left to struggle through the mish-mash of life alone. I had a Shepherd, a Saviour and, most of all, a Friend.

I had entered a new world. It was like being reborn. The grass was greener, the sky was bluer, birds were singing, people were people. I was a new creation, a brand-new "new-man".

There were some anxious moments, too. I wondered whether it would last, whether I was dreaming. There was plenty around to feed my doubts. People were bewildered; some became angry and frustrated; others amazed. Some reactions were violent and, taunts and threats were commonplace.

But thank God there were others who knew the same Jesus as Saviour. They encouraged me to trust the written word of God, and they trusted God with me.



A Way of Escape

The Major called me into his office. "Peter," he said, looking up from his big wooden desk, "I want you to take the hostel takings to the bank for me."

I stared at him in disbelief. There were over four hundred beds in that hostel and added up to an awful lot of money. This had to be some kind of joke.

"Er, you're judging me on, Sir," I said to him, "because I ain't ever been in a bank before in my life and I just wouldn't know what to do." Well, I made that my excuse anyway. The real reason for my hesitation was that I didn't trust myself with all those pound notes. Didn't the Major know that in times past I would have cheerfully nicked a pair of wings from an angel without even a twinge of remorse? Now, being a hostel foreman (my new position) was one thing, but trusting me with hundreds of pounds was another. It was out of the question.

The Major, however, didn't share my point of view. He thrust the cash bag and the paying book at me, told me to hand it all over to the cashier in the bank, then stood up to see me to the door. I was fuming. I turned to him on the steps of the hostel and said accusingly, "Major, you do realize what you're doing, don't you?"

"Yes, I know exactly what I'm doing, Peter. Now get a move on or else the bank'll be closed before you even get there," and in he marched leaving me grasping the blue bank bag. I stepped onto the street feeling absolutely livid. The Major was deliberately giving me the chance to take his money, and it was very likely that I would take him up on his offer. There was I, trying to lead a good, straight Christian life, and all he could do to help was to thrust temptation into my hands. I headed dismally up the road. The bank was only five

hundred yards away, but it felt like five hundred miles. I watched the buses as they roared past me. "Now that one would take me out of Manchester," I said to myself, but before I could continue my little mental dialogue, a very strange thing happened. My feet broke into a run and I sped post haste to the bank. I almost fell through the door before throwing the bag and paying-in book at the cashier. "Here," I said, "cop this little lot." He gave me a strange look and then started counting the cash and marking up the book.

He handed the empty bag and the book back to me and I stormed out of the bank towards the hostel. I knew that God had taken a hold of my feet and had caused me to run to the bank before I could do anything silly like making off with the money, but I wasn't angry with Him. No, it was the Major I was angry with; he'd been the one to put temptation across my path and I was jolly well going to give him a big piece of my mind. I raced up the hostel steps and barged into his office without even knocking at the door.

"Here," I said, throwing the book and the bag on his desk, "and don't you ever do that again. You knew I'd think about making off with it all, and a nice mess I'd be in now if I had."

I don't know what I expected him to do, but smiling wasn't on my list of guesses. He stood up and walked round his desk and put his arm on my shoulder.

"Peter," he said, "I had to trust God just as you did. I've been let down more times than I care to remember but I had to give you the chance to prove something to yourself. Something very important happened to you today. Now off you go and just think about it."

Well, I felt the wind drain out of my sails. All the anger I'd felt just disappeared as I turned round and meekly went out of his office and up the stairs to my cubicle. I sat on my bed and thought about what he'd said. Something important, he'd told me. Well, yes, God had helped me to resist a temptation which would have destroyed me, once upon a time. He'd made a way of escape for me. I reckon He knew that I really didn't want to walk out of His will by doing something dishonest, so He made my feet move a little faster than normal. Yes, I thought to myself, I've learned that sin and the old ways don't have to rule you when you're saved. In the old days it was as if I couldn't help but do wrong, but things were different now, I really was a new person.

I remember the thrill of getting my first week's pay at the hostel. It had been years since I had done an honest day's work and it felt good to pick up my little pay cheque from the hostel office. I'd earned the

grand sum of thirteen shillings (65 pence) and as soon as I got it, I took the bus into Salford where I marched into a second-hand clothes shop. A man and a woman were standing behind the counter.

"Now listen," I said, closing the door behind me. "I've got thirteen bob and need to be rigged out. These are all the clothes I've got," I said, pointing at my dirty old suit, "so what can you do for me, guvnor? You see, this is the story. Jesus has done something for me. You see how tatty and dirty my clothes are. Well, I used to be like that on the inside as well but Jesus has cleaned me up..." And on I went for the next quarter of an hour. I gave them my testimony and didn't miss anything out.

When I finished, the man spoke up. "I'm a Methodist," he said, his voice trembling. "I haven't been to church in years but I'm definitely going this Sunday. I'd almost forgotten that God is real."

The woman spoke up next. "What about me?" she said. "I'm a Roman Catholic but I've never heard anything like this before. I want to be like you."

But I never had the sense or wisdom to lead them to the Lord. I started to explain why I only had thirteen shillings to spend on my new wardrobe. "So what have you got that'll fit me?" I asked them. Well, I came out of that shop kitted up with everything I needed, from shoes to vests. They even gave me some free shaving gear and I said goodbye to them feeling richer than a king.

Life at the hostel was running smoothly but I started to feel unsettled. God was ready to move me on.



Something New and Clean

The new digs I moved into weren't very grand. I had an upstairs room in a terraced house in Manchester. It had a bed, a small wardrobe, a dressing table and fading wallpaper, but it was my first real step into independence. I also had a job in an iron foundry. The men I worked with gave me a hard time because they couldn't understand me, and the more I tried to explain about my new life, the worse the misunderstanding. They thought I was a bit mad and, looking back, I suppose I can appreciate why.

My new digs weren't far from the Salvation Army hall and to get to the Sunday services I had to walk past two pubs that I had once frequented. If I wanted to avoid walking past them, I had to make a lengthy detour around the back streets, so on my first visit to the hall since moving, I decided to take the most direct route. My Bible presented me with quite a problem: it was big and black and wouldn't fit inside any of my pockets, but I was loth to carry it ostentatiously under my arm to advertise my conversion to all my old drinking mates. Wisdom, I said to myself, is the order of the day. I rammed it inside my raincoat and headed off to the service.

It was too early for the pubs to open so I got to the hall without meeting up with any of my old companions, but I knew the story would be different on the way home. After the service I again rammed my Bible inside my raincoat. "Peter," the Major said to me, watching my antics, "you're taking the easy way out."

"Oh, am I now?" I said, rising to the challenge. "Well, Peter Newman never takes the easy way out." And with that I marched out of the hall with my Bible clenched firmly in my hand.

I was walking past one of the pubs when the landlady came out followed by a band of faithfuls. She saw me straight away and

shouted: "Hey, Peter, come in and have a drink. We've missed you. You weren't really all that bad you know." Then all the lads around her started laughing and shouting "Hallelujah!" I hardly dared look in their direction. I kept my eyes straight ahead and continued walking.

The same thing happened week after week. The landlady and her mates knew what time I'd be coming back from church and they would line up on the pavement and wait for me. It only took a few minutes to run the gauntlet past them, but they were the longest moments of the week. My big black Bible seemed to weigh a ton as I scuttled along, deliberately keeping my eyes fixed in the direction I was going. Home was always a welcome sight, and many's the time I'd rush up the stairs, throw my Bible down and fall onto my bed absolutely breathless.

I knew that they could never persuade me to go back to my old ways: drinking and Peter Newman had parted company for good. My fear was that I might lash out and give them a belt round the jaws. The old Peter Newman was a violent man, and while I had learned to trust God for many things, I wasn't totally convinced that the old aggro had disappeared. I'm glad to say that I survived my Sunday ordeals without putting any of my old drinking pals in hospital. After a couple of months the novelty of goading me seemed to wear off and they eventually stopped waiting for me to walk past the pub.

I used every opportunity I could find to preach the gospel. I soon discovered the secret of preaching in open-air meetings: I would direct my voice towards a wall which acted as an amplifier so that the afternoon rest of even more people was disturbed. If I had to travel anywhere by bus, I would stand on my feet on the open top deck and start to give my testimony. Not everyone appreciated my zeal and I was told to sit down and shut up on more than one occasion.

Someone once made the dreadful mistake of giving me an old drum. I used to take it onto the streets and bang it as loudly as I could. I couldn't drum properly, but everyone knew I was there and they would come out to find out what all the racket was about. As soon as I had an attentive, curious audience, I would introduce myself and tell them what Jesus had done for me.

I've spent many a night selling War Cry magazines in the pubs of Manchester. When other people sold the magazine they would tap possible buyers on the shoulder, look at them pleadingly and rattle their collection tins, but I had a better selling technique. I used to stand on a table and sing "The Old Rugged Cross". I sold far more

copies than anyone else. I still can't decide whether the men were genuinely moved or if they bought my wares to shut me up.

I once went back to my home town to preach outside a pub I had been drunk in many times. I was in the middle of telling the assembled crowd how the police had thrown me out of the town, telling me never to return, when that very sergeant rounded the corner. "And if you don't believe me," I shouted, pointing to the poor bobby, "then ask him." Well, he was off like a shot, much to the amusement of my little congregation.

The pub landlord had been sitting in his bedroom listening to me. As I was getting ready to return to Manchester, he came over, looking quite tearful. "Peter," he said, "I'm just amazed at what's happening to you. You're a different lad from the one I remember. If you ever need money for your work, just ask me and I'll give it to you." I felt humbled at this. Years before he used to loan me money for drink and now he wanted to give me money to help spread the gospel.

I was often puzzled and hurt at the way people rejected me. I was only a very young Christian and I just naturally assumed that churchgoers knew Jesus like I knew Him. I remember standing on the steps of one very posh church and saying "Praise the Lord" to the people as they walked in. They just glanced at me as if I was daft. "Poor soul," their looks seemed to say. But even those icy stares could not freeze the new life which was bubbling up inside me. I was full of the joy of the Lord. I may not have known much about social graces but I knew about God's grace. I knew that He loved and saved the outcast and that He could make something new and clean out of something dirty. I knew that He loved the unlovely, that His hand could reach down into the blackest cave of despair and pull the captive out of the darkness and into His most marvellous light. I knew all these things, not from reading a book, but because they had happened to me.



A Flock of Sheep to Preach to

I walked wearily upstairs to my room. That day at the foundry had seemed particularly hard and all I wanted to do was go to bed and sleep. My usual nightly routine was to pray and read my Bible; but that night, for the first time since getting saved, I just went straight off to sleep.

I awoke with a start just before four o'clock in the morning. The alarm hadn't gone off so I couldn't understand why I was awake. The rest of the house was silent. I looked around the room, wondering what had woken me from such a deep sleep. As I turned my head to the left, I saw the face of Jesus. My heart started to beat so loudly that I was sure everyone in the house would hear it. I was captivated by His eyes: they were so beautiful yet they seemed so sad. I immediately felt sorry for not praying and talking to Him before going off to sleep. My eyes moved slowly from His and I started to look at the rest of His face. There were some long thorns sticking into His forehead and some blood was slowly trickling down His cheekbone.

When I saw His blood, I was completely overtaken by a feeling of awe. I knew that that blood had been shed for me and the realization of His love and His majesty drove me from my bed and onto the floor where I lay face down, hardly daring to move. The presence of God was almost overpowering. I felt so small, so worthless, so insignificant. I looked up to see if His face was still there. It wasn't, but the power of God's presence was as real as ever.

Then I heard His voice. "Peter," he said, "I have called you to be an evangelist." Then the consciousness of His presence went.

I can't remember how long I lay on the floor before climbing, dazed, back into bed. As soon as my head touched the pillow, I fell into the deep sleep I'd wakened from.

As soon as I woke up, memories of the visitation flooded back to me. I knew I hadn't dreamt the whole thing. The word evangelist seemed to be burning in my heart. But there was a problem - I hadn't a clue what an evangelist was or what he did. My knowledge of the Bible was still very limited; big words always flummoxed me. I looked the word up in my concordance and I soon discovered that Philip had been an evangelist. So the matter was settled. I was going to be like Philip.

It was several days before I told anyone about what had happened to me that night. The first person to know was an officer at the Salvation Army. He decided that I might be officer material and that I ought to start the candidates' course. One of the main problems was my lack of basic education. I could just about read and write but that was all. A kind Salvation Army couple volunteered to teach me the basics of English and I was thrilled to discover the difference between nouns, verbs and adjectives and the like. I worked hard to acquire these new skills, and when the big day of the interview arrived, I felt that I stood a fairly good chance of being accepted.

There were quite a few candidates waiting to be interviewed by the selection panel. When it was my turn, I was taken into a room where the members of the panel were sitting, and I remember thinking that they all looked like saints. As I stood before them, all I could hear was a voice ringing in my ears: "Peter, I have called you to be an evangelist."

"Excuse me," I said, before they had a chance to start questioning me. "Can you guarantee that I'll be an evangelist?" They all looked a bit startled at my uninvited question, but after a few seconds an elderly gentleman, who had just finished reading my report, muttered something about my past experiences being invaluable in the social work side of the Army.

"Sirs," I insisted, hardly hearing what the gentleman had said, "you must guarantee that I'm to be an evangelist."

The panel asked me what I meant and I explained as best I could. "So you see," I said, "I've got to be like him in the Bible."

"Like who in the Bible?" said the old gentleman.

"Like Philip," I said, exasperated by their lack of understanding. They all looked at each other, thanked me very much for attending the interview, then told me I could go. That was the last I heard from them. I wasn't too upset about not being accepted. After all, if they couldn't guarantee that I would be working as an evangelist, then that settled the matter as far as I was concerned. I may have been a bit

thick academically, but at least I knew that I had to be obedient to what God had shown me.

Before the interview I'd been so sure that I would be an officer that I'd handed in my notice at the foundry. So with no job to keep me in Manchester, I decided to spend Christmas with my sister. I tried to get a job in the area but everyone remembered me as the pre-converted Peter. I bought a bike, a bucket and some ladders and set myself up in business as a window cleaner. I used to go from house to house, singing at the top of my voice and giving my testimony whenever I could.

Most of my spare time was spent up in the hills. I loved the countryside and spent most evenings and weekends stalking across the fields preaching to the turnips. On a really good day I would have a flock of sheep to preach to. They might not have been a responsive congregation, but they looked as if they were listening to me and at least I was practising at being an evangelist.

On Sundays I went to the local Baptist church to worship. One week a retired missionary, who must have been well into his eighties, was preaching. His text was "Thou art the man" and in the middle he stepped down from his pulpit, walked down the aisle and stood in front of me. He announced: "And thou art the man, Peter, to preach next Sunday." I could hardly believe my ears; I was panic-stricken. But I wasn't one to back out. I had wanted to move forward, and here I was, graduating from turnips to sheep to people. The missionary packed me off home with a commentary on Luke's Gospel which I duly devoured over the following days.

The big day arrived. We all sang some hymns, listened to some Bible readings and then I got to my feet and strode to the pulpit. I delivered my sermon and sat down, eager for the service to end so that I could ask the old missionary how I'd sounded.

"That was marvellous, Peter," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "It's the first time I've heard three sermons preached inside of twenty minutes. Well done!"

It was the beginning of small things. I was asked to preach again, so my sermon can't have been all that bad, and then I was invited to preach in a nearby church. This is it, I thought; my fame is spreading. I was so thrilled at being so much in demand that I persuaded my step-sister, Shirley, to come along and listen to me spout forth. She agreed to come.

The Sunday arrived. I had my sermon all ready and I was delighted that Shirley was going to hear what a good preacher I was. We arrived

at the church where I was to lead the hymn singing as well as deliver my pearls of scriptural wisdom. I climbed ceremoniously into the pulpit and eyed the congregation. The church wasn't exactly filled to capacity. In its heyday it had seated six hundred. That particular Sunday it boasted a congregation of six, including Shirley and the organist. But I was undaunted.

I handed the organist the list of hymns which I'd chosen to fit in with my sermon.

"I can't play any of these," she whispered as she scanned the titles.

"Well," I whispered back, "what can you play then?"

She was thoughtful for a second. "How about All Things Bright and Beautiful?" she replied.

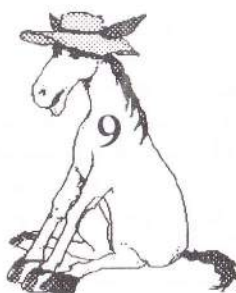
So, "All Things Bright and Beautiful" it was, although the singing hardly did justice to the title. The hymn ended and I opened my Bible to start preaching. This was the moment I'd dreamed about all week: Shirley was sure to tell everyone how inspired my preaching was and how the call of God was unmistakably on my life. I took a deep breath and was about to start when the church doors opened at the back and a man called out, "Come down, young man, I'm booked to preach here today."

I could hardly believe my ears. He strode down to the front and stood at the pulpit steps waiting for me to climb down and make way for him. I felt so humiliated that I wished the ground would open and swallow me up. I glanced at Shirley on the front row. Surprise was written right across her face. I picked up my Bible, walked down the steps, passed the preacher and sat down next to Shirley. I haven't a clue what he preached about. I was too angry and upset to care. My moment of glory had been snatched away from me and now Shirley might never know how brilliant a preacher I was. I didn't even have the grace to say goodbye to the preacher after the service. I just wanted to be as far away from that place of defeat as quickly as possible.

It was some time later that God showed me why He had allowed such a humiliating thing to happen. He wanted all the glory, and I had to remember that I was only His vessel. He was the treasure within me and I had no right to seek after fame or self-glorification. The incident also taught me that you should never try to impress men. God is the one we should seek to serve and to please. So, what my step-sister thought or thinks about me and my preaching is quite irrelevant. These are lessons which God has had to teach me over and over again, and the lessons aren't all learnt yet.

A few weeks after my demise, someone asked if I wanted to go to a nearby town to hear an evangelist who was holding some meetings. My ears pricked up at the word evangelist and I agreed. I went the first night and was so impressed by his preaching that I went back every other night too. Only one thing troubled me and that was his suits. They were, well, almost theatrical, with gold threads one night and silver ones the next. If I was to be an evangelist, then I decided that God would have to make a special set of rules for me because nothing would induce me to wear such gaudy clothes.

This evangelist chap fascinated me. I wanted to find out as much about him as I could. I wanted to see how he lived, how he spoke to people when he was off the platform, what he ate, how he behaved. So I gave up window cleaning for the week, found the hotel he was staying in and started to spy on him. I was there when he turned up for breakfast. I was there at lunch time too. I watched his every move and was quick to discover something about him which disturbed me deeply: he was suave and well polished. I noted that he probably knew the difference between an adjective and a verb without being told.



Never the Same Again

So the great evangelist came and went, and my life settled back into its usual routine of window cleaning, walking in the hills and preaching in local churches. The days ran into weeks, the weeks into months.

One day my sister asked me if I'd ever thought of getting married. I said that I felt marriage was not for me and that my eye was on the call of God. In my own wisdom I thought that marriage would be a hindrance. Perhaps my subconscious reminded me of the anger of that minister's wife when he had tried to help me. I headed for town to keep an appointment with some dirty windows.

I reached the traffic lights as they turned green and was about to drive on when a Salvation Army officer rode straight across my path on her bicycle while her lights were on red. She was in full uniform, bonnet and all and she had a little dog in the basket in front of the handlebars. She was pedalling with such concentration that she didn't even notice me brake to avoid hitting her.

"Typical," I thought, "just because she's in the Army she thinks she can do anything and go anywhere. It's a good thing God's got His hand on her, otherwise she'd be splattered across the bonnet of my car by now." I was in the middle of mentally giving her a piece of my mind when something seemed to go "ping". "Cupid" had shot the arrow. Then God spoke to me. "That's the girl you're going to marry, Peter," he said. "I've chosen her for you."

Without losing a second, I changed direction and set off to find out where she lived. I could hardly let the girl I was going to marry pedal out of my life before she had properly pedalled into it. I drove up one street, then another, and then I saw her Salvation Army bonnet bobbing up and down. I followed behind and watched her turn into a

side street. She got off her bike and went into a house. I got out of my car, made some inquiries and discovered it was the Salvation Army officers' quarters. Straight away I felt very led to clean their windows for them. When I finished I knocked on the door. The girl on the bike answered it and we soon got chatting. I discovered she was called Barbara.

I floated home on air. "I've met the girl I'm going to marry," I said to my sister as soon as I opened the front door. She seemed confused. "But I thought you weren't going to get married," she said, "and anyway, does this girl know you're going to marry her? It all seems mighty quick to me."

"No, she doesn't know yet," I answered. "I only met her today."

"Goodness me, Peter," said my sister as she sank into a chair. "You really are the limit, you know. You can't just marry the girl without letting her know about it first. You want to get some of these silly ideas out of your head. If you're going to marry this what-ever-she's-called, then you're going to have to court her and take her out like any other normal young man. You can't just meet her one day and wed her the next. Honestly, I sometimes wonder what sort of religion you've got!"

I smiled at her and went to unload the car. She was perfectly right, of course, so I decided to ride over to the house and ask Barbara out. She said yes and our courtship began. We had a lot in common but the most important thing was that we both wanted God's will for our lives and we both wanted to serve Him. We both prayed about our relationship and exactly six months from the day God spoke to me and said she was to be my wife, we were married. The only sad part was that Barbara had to leave the Salvation Army because I wasn't even a member, never mind an officer. She decided to make a clean break, which was not pleasant for her or the Army, but it had to be.

After the wedding we went to live in Barbara's home town of Plymouth. We moved into a flat, attended a Salvation Army hall on Sundays but spent Saturday nights in a little evangelical mission hall. Within months I was preaching all over the place: I was on the Methodist plan and the Baptist and Congregationalist list of speakers. I preached three times on a Sunday and worked hard on a building site during the week.

Bit by bit we started getting a home together. On the surface, everything seemed to be working out well. After a year we had our first little girl, Elaine, and I should have been the happiest man around. But I had a deep sense of frustration. The call of God, which

had once so burned in my heart, had somehow been swamped by the pressures of building a home, supporting a family and becoming a prolific preacher. My days were full of activity but somehow I felt there was something important missing.

It was a few months before I found out what it was. Meanwhile I was offered a job which I'd always wanted. I was to be a sales representative. No longer would I need overalls, dungarees and clodhopper boots. I was to have a respectable white collar job. My hands would be nice and clean when I got home at night; I would no longer have to spend a quarter of an hour scrubbing the muck from them before cuddling my young daughter.

So each morning, I left home wearing a smart suit and brandishing a briefcase, the ultimate symbol of my new found success. I earned good money and our future was bright.

I was still a popular preacher. One week Barbara and I were asked to take some evening meetings in a mission hall. Each evening I rushed home from work, grabbed some tea, then bundled myself, Barbara and little Elaine into the car to drive to the little hall where Barbara would sing and I would preach. It was to be a week which would change my whole Christian life.

The beginning of new things started the night we gave a man a lift home. As we drove along he turned to me and said, "Peter, you need the baptism in the Holy Spirit!"

The baptism in the Holy Spirit? How dare he suggest that I wasn't properly saved! I was very annoyed at his impertinence; how could he talk to me, a preacher, in such a way? Who did he think he was?

I think he sensed my disapproval because he immediately started to explain that this baptism in the Holy Spirit was a separate experience to salvation and that it had given the early disciples the power to witness and evangelize.

Now I was interested.

As soon as we got home I opened my Bible and read about the promise of the Comforter in St John's Gospel. Then I turned to the Acts of the Apostles. I'd studied it thousands of times before, yet it was as if I was reading it for the first time. I read about the gift of tongues and other gifts of this Holy Spirit.

I set off in hot pursuit of the subject. I talked about it with Christians from many different denominations and was often surprised at the reaction it brought. Some told me to keep well away from such teaching. They said that surely I realized that the baptism in the Holy Spirit had been for the early church only, and that God

was doing things differently now. I discovered that the gift of tongues was a great bone of contention. Some people told me it was from the devil and that I should steer clear of it at all costs. Others I spoke to were far more sympathetic and said that, while they themselves hadn't experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit, they felt it was a valid experience for the church today. Looking back, I feel a bit sorry for Barbara. All I ever seemed to talk to her about over those weeks was the baptism in the Holy Spirit. She showed an interest in what I said, but she didn't share my insatiable appetite for the subject.

The man who first told me about it got in touch with me and asked me over to his house for tea. I eagerly accepted his invitation and drove to his home with a great feeling of anticipation. "Lord," I prayed as I drove along, "if this experience is for me, then could I have it tonight, please?"

We had our tea, talked about the week's meetings I'd taken in the little mission hall, discussed the state of the world and the Christian church, but we never seemed to get around to talking about the one thing I was desperate to hear about. He kept getting up and down to put records on and I thought, "Lord, isn't he ever going to get on with it and tell me all he knows about the baptism in the Spirit?"

After what seemed like a decade he asked me if I would like to pray with him. We went to his bedroom where we would not be disturbed, and at once he began to pray. By now I was feeling totally exasperated. My mind was full of all sorts of things, but it eventually started to tune in with God. I was praying quietly when I suddenly remembered the scripture which says that if you ask God for the Holy Spirit, then God will give Him to you; He won't give you a stone instead.

"Lord," I prayed silently, "I only want what You have for me. I don't want anything else...." And then it happened. I was miraculously and, in my case, dramatically baptized in the Holy Spirit. The only person I was aware of in that room was God. He was everywhere. I felt that I was being swept along on a tidal wave of His love and power. I don't know how many minutes ticked by, but I remember coming to and being somewhat surprised to find myself jumping up and down on this dear man's bed with my shoes on. I was singing and dancing and praising the Lord in a new language which just kept flowing out from my lips.

I told Barbara all about it when I eventually got home. She didn't say much, but she couldn't deny that something very extraordinary had happened to me. For three whole days I was "drunk" in the

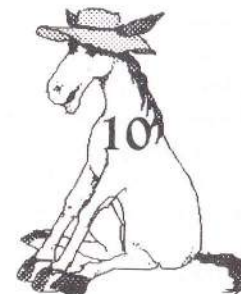
Spirit. Every morning I left the house in my sober suit with my briefcase tightly clasped in my hand; but, if anyone stopped to say hello, I could only say, "Hallelujah!" and continue on my way singing and praising God. A week later the man who had prayed with me came to our house and prayed for Barbara, and she too received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We were both quickened by the Spirit of God. It's little wonder that the devil has so many people blinded about the necessity of being baptised in the Spirit. It's like dynamite; once you receive it, you're never the same again. The Holy Spirit causes you to thirst and hunger after more of God. Barbara and I found that all we wanted to do was lay our lives unquestioningly before Him. We asked Him to do whatever He wanted with our lives. We were willing to go where He wanted us to go; to speak what He gave us to say. We entered a new realm of yielding. We both felt His presence in a way which we'd never done before. After all those barren, dry months it was as refreshing as the rain itself. The wilderness which had sprung up in our hearts was indeed starting to blossom as a rose. God became our main topic of conversation; we couldn't help but praise Him for leading us into this new experience.

We talked eagerly of going to Bible College. We knew it would be a big step, but we were open to whatever the Lord had for us, and Bible College seemed the logical step. But God doesn't work according to our own understanding. One evening when we were both praying quietly in tongues, I felt God start to give me the interpretation.

Neither of us knew much about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but what we know in our heads isn't always important in the kingdom of God. Obedience is the key to blessing. God gave me a chapter and a verse to look up in the Bible. I eagerly turned to John 2 verse 27 and read: "But the anointing which you have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but...the same anointing teacheth you of all things." We knew straight away that God was telling us that Bible College was not going to be our next stopping place. We said amen to the will of God. We knew that if college was out, then He had something else in store for us. It still amazes me to think that God has a perfect plan for individual lives. All we need to do is to tune in to Him and wait on Him and He will show us the way.

We were acknowledging Him in all our ways, so He was bound by His word to direct our paths.



"I Can't Tell Them That!"

We were going to live in a Christian commune in Worthing. I resigned from my job; we found homes for all the much loved bits and pieces of furniture we'd gathered together over our short married life. I felt I was responding to God who had spoken to me so clearly and said, "Peter, leave all and follow Me."

The week before we were to join the Christian Publicity Organisation Commune, I was booked to take a week's meetings. It was during that mission that God taught me a very big lesson, namely that we have to be wholly true before Him and before our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

My wife was singing on the platform. The little church was packed to the doors. Barbara sounded beautiful and I was just sitting back drinking it all in when God spoke to me. "Peter," He said, "what sort of picture of you and Barbara are you painting for all those people? Do they see you as the perfect young couple about to be launched out into the work of God? Peter, there are people here tonight who look at you both and feel so inadequate: they feel failures in comparison. There are married couples here who feel guilty because they have so many ups and downs in their home life. I want you to be truthful and to tell them exactly what happened before you came to the meeting tonight."

I held my breath. "But God," I argued, "I can't tell them that. Barbara will have a fit and besides, it's personal!" But God had spoken and I had to bow to what He had told me to do. Barbara ended her song and I stood up, knowing very well that she would laugh me when we got home.

"Isn't my wife lovely?" I said to the congregation. "Hasn't she got a

lovely voice?" They all sat there smiling and nodded their heads.

"Aren't we a nice young couple, called of God, about to go into full time work for Him, going forth to conquer in His name?" And again they all sat nodding their heads in agreement.

"Well, let me tell you something which might surprise you all." I glanced across at Barbara who was on the edge of her seat, looking alarmed. "Before my wife and I came to the meeting tonight we had a humdinger of a row." Barbara blanched, then she gasped, then she stared unbelievably at me. The congregation followed suit, their eyes darting first to me then to her, then back to me again. I immediately started to preach.

Jesus says that you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Many couples were set free that night. The enemy had had them bound with chains of condemnation. Why, they'd never dreamt that evangelists were just ordinary human beings who did such unspiritual things as row with their wives. I always feel it's very wrong of men of God to pretend to be what they aren't. So often they give the impression of being so perfect and they hate people to discover otherwise. Well, I love exposing the myth. Yes, evangelists are called of God, but they are no different from anybody else.

Jesus said that the greatest among you should minister to others. We all have a part to play in the body of Christ. An evangelist is called to preach the gospel; a prayer warrior is called to pray; someone given to hospitality is to open their home to others. We all have something to do in the kingdom of God and we should never puff ourselves up in the ministry which God has given to us.

So Barbara and I set off for Worthing with only our clothes, the baby's cot, our train tickets and a ten shilling note (fifty pence). We climbed into the carriage and settled into a compartment opposite two elderly ladies. Within hours of setting off in this new life of faith, God showed us again that He is able to meet our needs.

We were all sitting there, gazing out of the windows at the countryside as it sped past us, when God spoke to me and told me to go to the dining car. "But Lord," I argued, "I haven't got any money, especially if we're both supposed to go." So I decided the Lord was only meaning me.

"No," He said, "take Barbara and go to the dining car." "But what about the baby, Lord?" I argued, still trying to wriggle out of it.

Just then one of the old ladies spoke up: "If you two want to go to lunch, we'd be more than willing to look after the baby for you."

"Thank you very much," I said, with very mixed emotions. I told

Barbara to hand Elaine over to them. Then I took her by the arm and led her into the corridor. There was a look of horror on her face. As soon as we were out of earshot she whispered, "Where on earth are we going?" I said that God had spoken to me, that we should both go to the dining car.

"But we can't afford to. How much money have we got?" She knew full well what the answer was going to be and she looked exasperated when I waved the ten shilling note in the air. "But we can't both have a meal with that," she said. Now, she knew that I knew that, but God apparently didn't. "God's spoken to me and we've got to do exactly what He says from now on," I said, and off we marched into the dining car.

When we came to our table my wife very wisely put me on the inside nearest the window, so she could sit near the aisle to make a quick getaway! The menu was brought to us. It was ten shillings and six pence each. We ordered two meals while I sat and nervously fingered the ten shilling note in my trouser pocket. It was round about election time and the man sitting opposite me started talking about the political climate of the day. This was my chance! I gradually turned the conversation round to the Lord and explained that one day the government of the world would be on His shoulders. The man seemed really interested and said I reminded him of someone he'd known who believed the same sort of things as we did. It transpired that I knew his friend and that we'd held open-air meetings together some years before.

We chatted merrily away, thoroughly enjoying the meal and the company of this stranger. Just after the ice-cream course my wife excused herself and said she had to go to see to the baby. What a wise woman she is! The cheese-board arrived next. I took a piece and was eating it with some celery, thinking "This is the life," when I remembered that any minute the waiter was going to arrive with the bill. I stopped hearing what the man opposite me was saying. Panic started to well up from where my nice three-course meal was lying. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the waiter heading menacingly in my direction, holding a slip of paper in his hand. My heart was rattling against my rib-cage as, sure enough, he arrived and put the bill on a plate before me. As I reached out for it the man opposite me barred my arm, grabbed the piece of paper and said that he would like to pay for our meal. I didn't argue with his kindness.

When I got back to the compartment I quietly told Barbara what had happened and we both simply sat there, praising the Lord in our