

**A handbook for effective living
in the twenty-first century**

**End of Survival
and
Beginning of Living**

**Edited
by
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Published December 1991 by
Effective Living Publications
P.O. Box 140 Gladesville 2111
Australia

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Effective Living Publications

ISBN 0 646 05601 8

Printed in Australia by
Ambassador Press Pty. Ltd.,
Granville 2142

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FOREWORD

As a world we stand poised on the threshold of a new world order. Will our global village be marked by justice and compassion for all? Or will future generations condemn us for missing the historic opportunities now unfolding?

The choice is still ours to make. Change for the better *is* possible — in ourselves, in our families, in our communities and nations, in the world.

The story behind this book begins with the Oxford Group, now known as Moral Re-Armament. A Christian movement prominent in the 1930s, the Oxford Group brought a spiritual awakening to countless thousands in many countries. There was no membership. Rather it was a way of life where faith was made practical: practical in the sense of personal change with its clear — if informal — steps of change; and practical in that faith was related to the needs of the world as a whole.

In 1938 the Oxford Group metamorphosed into Moral Re-Armament, or MRA. Frank Buchman, the initiator of the Oxford Group, launched a call for moral and spiritual rearmament at a time when the world was frantically rearming militarily. Today there is a global network of people whose vision of a world remade under God has helped enable reconciliation and creative dialogue across divides of race, class, creed and nation.

This book also draws on three vital developments of this century. First is Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA, who themselves evolved from the Oxford Group in response to the particular needs of alcoholics. In the crucible of alcoholic experience the steps of change of

the Oxford Group were forged into the twelve steps of AA. This clear spiritual statement, together with sharing groups — also a feature of the Oxford Group — have contributed greatly to AA's rapid growth worldwide.

Second is the contribution by Freud, Jung, and many others who have helped us become more aware of what makes us act the way we do. This has allowed us to embark with greater clarity on the spiritual journey within.

Finally and more recently we have been reminded of the 'forgotten relationship'. Not only does reconciliation need to take place within, and with others, but also with the environment.

The eight steps of change in this book are based on Christian principles. Written in a non-religious language, they can be read by anyone. All that is needed is a willingness to begin with the God of our understanding.

This book is a start in our common endeavour to know God, and find meaning and purpose in life. For those without faith it is a challenge to try an honest experiment, to 'give it a go'. For those with faith, it is a challenge to live it out.

The authors, a group of ordinary people, choose to remain anonymous. Their one aim is to make readily available this simple way of living that works.

Sydney 1991

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

A Chinese proverb relates that the longest journey begins with the first step. These pages are a challenge to read in that light: to see how they apply to us.

Part one lists eight steps of change. The eight life stories in part two each illustrate one of the eight steps of change, *and are best read together with the corresponding step*. Part three outlines eight practical aids for living.

Inevitably this handbook will provoke questions — questions often glossed over in life. As such it is preferable to read with time to reflect and jot down thoughts and queries as they arise. The eight steps lend themselves also to small group discussion.

These steps of change are a guide, not a fixed way — pointing elsewhere to grow further. They are a start, the first steps along a journey that will take the rest of our lives.

PART ONE

EIGHT STEPS OF CHANGE

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Step One

CHANGE STARTS WITH ME

If I want to see the world different change starts with me. I am either part of the cure or part of the disease.

The twenty-first century offers new hope. Perhaps as never before there is the opportunity to fill empty stomachs with food, empty hands with work, and empty hearts with a purpose for life that really satisfies.

Yet these are not the only marks of our age. We have only to look around us to know all is not well. The hope for the future rests with bridging the gulf between what could and should be, and what actually is. The realisation that change is needed is where we can all begin.

So just how do we make a new start? Many genuinely feel if only some other person or unjust situation changed, then all would be well. There is a saying: 'When I point my finger at my neighbour, there are three more pointing back at me'. The very first step is a willingness to accept that 'change starts with me'.

For some the motivation to change comes from a concern for the state of the world. We are more and more aware of environmental abuse, religious division, the widening rich poor gap, the level of armaments. With the very future of the world hanging in the balance, the urgency to be 'part of the cure' instead of 'part of the disease' has begun to hit home.

STEP ONE

Others are simply not coping. Life has become a daily battle to survive. Feeling at the mercy of life's circumstances and destructive habits, we are desperate to rise above them.

Many more are searching. Though coping in life and even doing well in achieving our goals, deep down we intuitively know there just has to be more meaning and purpose to life than we have yet discovered.

These steps of change are a great leveller, a non-respecter of background or personality or position. Whatever our starting point, the evidence is conclusive: change *is* possible and we *can* make a difference, whoever we are and whatever we have done, or not done.

This is a way of life that works, where the past no longer controls the present. There is a new happiness and a bigger purpose as we join company with the many across the centuries who have dared to live for something more than self-interest. Not only is there light at the end of the tunnel but also the vision of a new world, for we know if we can change and find something new, anyone can!

[Read story one, 'My Need for Change', page 24]

Step Two

GOD HAS A PLAN

'God has a plan for the world.' I can find my part in that plan as I daily decide to turn my life and my will over to the care of God as I understand Him.

Ours is an age of spiritual hunger. Most today grow up in a moral and spiritual vacuum. For many others God is concerned only with 'getting us', or else is an old man, somewhere 'up there'. And with all the suffering in the world, God's plan — if there is such a plan — doesn't seem to be working all that well.

There is a delightful story of a boy asking his father for something to do. The father tore up a sheet of paper with a map of the world on it, and told his son to put it back together. In a very short time the boy finished. The father was astonished. The boy explained that on the other side of the map was the picture of a man. "When you get the person right, you get the world right."

As we start with ourselves change, and belief, comes. Whatever our objections or preconceptions, experience has shown that anyone can find God and new life.

The door to knowing God swings on the hinges of willingness. Without becoming overly concerned about results or with defining perfectly Who, or What, God is, we can learn to take one step at a time.

So exactly *how* is our life and our will turned over to the care of 'God as I understand Him'? This is in fact

STEP TWO

what the rest of this book is about. In giving each step an honest try there is a growing certainty of the love of God; that God can change what we cannot.

The one essential is to stick at it. There is a saying that if you want to grow potatoes, grab the hoe — far too many of us expect a bumper harvest without any effort on our part. The old way of attacking problems with self-will is deeply ingrained and nothing short of a continuous working on these steps brings lasting change.

This road is one of endless discovery of God's plan for our lives, and for the world in which we live. As we learn to listen to the still small voice within, so the courage comes to follow its call to be true to our own life's purpose beyond all the many pressures to conform.

[Read story two, 'All the Difference', page 28]

Step Three

TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Who is the real person behind the masks I put on? The need for a good look in the mirror, to measure my life against absolute moral standards.

After a century of materialism more and more are searching to find the real person within — the person behind the possessions, the job, the many activities. The way to such reality starts with reality about ourselves. Only as we see who we are not can we begin to realise who we are meant to be.

Often we are vague about where we might be lacking — it's easier that way. Absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help show specifically how to 'take a good look in the mirror'.¹

The term 'absolute' sounds a bit extreme at first. After all we are not God — no-one is perfect. Here it is direction, not perfection, that is the focus — that we aim for the best, and not be content with less. Some have likened absolute moral standards to the stars for the old seafarers — an unchanging reference point to set the course by, not that we ever reach them.

In sincerely going through these standards, things come to mind. Some are events from childhood. Others are more recent. Some deal with dishonesty and others with wrong habits and relationships. Writing these down helps bring clarity.

¹See 'Absolute Moral Standards', page 62

STEP THREE

At first it may appear these discoveries will soon run out. Like an iceberg however, the deeper we go the more we see. Our growing up experiences, buried under many layers of practised forgetfulness, very much shape our 'survival strategies'. Hurt and humiliated by life we don't want to live vulnerably and often use others to fill needs in ourselves. Behind masks of self-confidence or shyness are very powerful fears and desires for security, sex, and success.

This moment of truth however is our very point of breakthrough and spiritual awakening. One step at a time we can shed the excess baggage in our lives, giving an inner sense of growth and direction.

Looking at certain character traits has also proved helpful. In acknowledging our negative traits and becoming willing to 'let go' and 'let God' take over, so change for the better takes place — we are not stuck with them!¹

An ongoing moral reckoning is the gateway to a loving God. One pitfall however is to focus on 'respectable' behaviour and judge others accordingly. Here, though we have given the house over to God, the attic is still very much in our control. As we become willing, praying even to be willing to be made willing, always a door opens. By God's grace we are able to face our deeper hurts and motives in life, and find freedom.

[*Read story three, 'The Pearl of Great Price', page 33*]

¹See 'Character Traits', page 63

Step Four

TELL IT LIKE IT IS

The need to be honest with myself, with God, and with someone else about my life, and to ask God's help to be different.

Honesty is seldom associated with achievement in life. 'Success' equals wealth, or beauty, or power, or recognition. 'Humility' on the other hand means being a doormat and as such we keep our distance!

Experience however has shown that honesty with ourselves leads to improved relationships and decision making. Things relentlessly gone after begin to come our way with much less effort. Our eyes are also opened to see how others suffer in the single-minded pursuit of our goals — often the very ones we claim it is all for.

The key to such honesty is to tell someone else the truth of our lives. Our worry here is what others will think if we share what we are *really* like. To find someone who has understood their own nature and learnt to keep confidences is vital. Sometimes a total stranger is the best person, who can reassure us we are in no way unique — and what good news that is!

In 'telling it like it is', we experience a profound sense of forgiveness and release from guilt. As we share, *and are willing to hold nothing back*, we are reassured we have indeed been honest with ourselves and with God, and have crossed the threshold.

Telling it like it is — to ourselves, to God, to some-

STEP FOUR

one else — leads to a further step: to ask God's help to be different, for new motives in life. This is essential if we are to break free of the old negative patterns of thinking and living.

It is easy to underestimate the hold of the old lifestyle. Our change upsets the status quo, and we have to learn to ask for patience — with others as well as with ourselves.

Some have tried going it alone, but to the extent that we try to change in our own strength, progress is impossible. Sometimes difficulty arises in the actual asking — asking God daily for help cuts at our self-sufficiency. Sometimes fear of the unknown holds us back. We are afraid to leave the shore, the known way.

Often our picture of God is too small. This suits us because we still want control of the steering wheel. However there is far more to this life than asking God to rescue us from difficult circumstances or a guilty conscience.

Turning our will over to the care of God is a new way of life altogether. As we keep trusting step by step our confidence grows, and a wholly new sense of purpose comes to birth.

[Read story four, 'Brotherhood of Man', page 37]

Step Five

TAKE DOWN THE WALLS

Which walls divide me from others? To make a list of all those I have hurt, and become willing to make amends.

We grow up with walls. They protect us from difficult people and situations, and are often put up without thinking. However walls not only keep others out, they also keep us in.

Which are the walls that divide us from others? Often we bury painful memories. In searching our hearts many incidents and resentments surface. Often it takes time to see the need of the person who has hurt us — in other words, to choose to forgive. Our resentments seem so justified!

Then there are the many *we* have hurt or ignored with barely a second thought. Here there is a greater moral duty to take down the walls but still we resist feeling into the other person's pain in life — even when we are the cause.

In focussing only on our feelings and needs we invariably fail to see the other person's. This 'victim' approach feeds our self-pity and denies any responsibility. In learning to 'let go and let God', we are able to see where we too are in the wrong, and become willing to take the first step in making amends.

So often we meet a positive response, leading to deep and lasting friendships. Walls come down — not only with others, but also within. We begin to know a new inner strength and peace.

Feelings may have to be surrendered for many

STEP FIVE

months before a sense of forgiveness comes — especially true in close relationships. Having faced our responsibility, the next step is to learn to leave the person or situation entirely in God's hands.

Occasionally people don't respond. Here the need is to see beyond only how events or people affect us. An apology may reopen wounds the other person prefers left alone. Often it just takes time.

Sometimes we are to blame, turning into 'sorry machines'. The key is the *willingness* to make amends. The when and where, and even 'if at all', are further considerations. The focus is not saying sorry, but making sure our own lives are free of resentments.

The best sorry is to *live* differently. Starting with those nearest, we can give to God what we have long hung onto. A deep healing begins to take place — forgiveness and humility are never beyond reach. Step by step we become whole people — people more able to love, people more able to play a constructive role in society.

[*Read story five, 'The Power of Apology', page 42*]

Step Six

BE STILL

Daily to be quiet and come into God's presence. To pray for a knowledge of His will, and the power to carry it out.

To be still in today's restless world is definitely an acquired art. A lot have 'busyness' withdrawal symptoms and the temptation is to rush in and fill the void — it takes time to be 'de-programmed'. Yet in daily coming to God we become more and more aware of His will and discover that God is real, loves us, and wants only the best for us.

God is real to the extent we spend time with Him. There is a vast difference between taking time to be with God and paying a fleeting visit.¹ Many find the stillness of the morning best when our minds are fresh, and daily concerns — and excuses — yet to press in.

In the clamour of life around us we are often distracted, losing our peace. Times spent in quiet are a time to be separate, to be still and wait in God's presence. Only then do we have the clarity to tell what is important and what is distraction, and find the courage to chart a new course in life.

In learning prayer is a dialogue with God — not a monologue — so we learn to develop a listening ear to that still small voice within. Intuitive thoughts of

¹See 'A Suggested Daily Quiet Time', page 64

STEP SIX

what to do or not do often come — at times amazingly detailed. Jotting these down to recall later is a discovery at least as important as the wheel!

In our walk with God, there are 'dry' times when the 'why' isn't always clear. It is important to acknowledge our feelings, and as best we can to rest in God's presence. In practising this 'letting go' we find a peace beyond understanding in the midst of our unrest or pain. Though difficult these times enrich our lives, and we emerge more determined to know and follow God.

It is not always easy to distinguish between demanding things on our terms and asking in trust. Where we trust God our intuitive sense of His will grows, together with the readiness to obey.¹ If we feel we can't obey, we can turn to God and in asking for help, the power to obey does come.

This step into inner solitude and silence becomes our anchor point for life. Our vantage point changes. Instead of feeling helpless at the hands of fate and our own human nature, we gain totally new insights and perspectives. As we experience the love and acceptance of God, so we become free to love and accept others. 'Be still', more than a set time each day, becomes part of the very fabric of our lives.

[Read story six, 'The God Shaped Hole', page 46]

¹See 'Exploring God's Will', page 65

Step Seven

A NEW WORLD

A new world vision opens up as I continue to apply these steps. I see my life in relationship to society, history and the environment.

The spiritual life is like a long distance race. After the initial burst of enthusiasm we have to learn to get into stride with God. Experiences of others give vital perspective, especially when we seem to be making little headway.¹ Breakthroughs always do come — if not according to our timetable.

As 'quiet times' become more of a habit, we are able to see our lives in relationship to the world and its history. We discover more 'blind spots' in our thinking, only to find they are not spots but whole areas hidden from view — and we think we are the masters of our lives!

In looking at racial, religious, class and national attitudes, the discoveries are many: our ignorance and apathy; basing opinions of whole groups on the actions of a few; the unerring talent to be specific about the wrongs of others, of other nations, and yet be blind to our own.

The truth begins to dawn that we are all to blame, that we all have prejudices. By God's grace, we are able to see where change — personal and corporate — is needed; that we too are part of the unjust attitudes

¹See 'Quotes', page 66

STEP SEVEN

and structures that lock so many into poverty and powerlessness, and destroy the environment, for our own gain.

Such honesty brings a new freedom to listen to God in others even if their politics, customs or religion differ to ours. This doesn't mean compromising our beliefs. On the contrary, the way is opened to genuine dialogue where we can share our deepest convictions without feeling we have to defend our position or make the other person agree with us.

Often new insights open up. Some are painful as we discover others do not always view us the way we see ourselves. But also we gain a new appreciation of what is positive and unique in our background. A new world vision begins to dawn — what if others find what we ourselves are beginning to find: a healing and forgiveness across all those man made barriers that prevent long term solutions being worked out.

In learning to accept ourselves as we are — the good *and* the bad in our nation's history and make up — so we are able to accept others. Where wrongs exist we are often able to make amends. Walls of class, race and creed continue to come down and in some cases centuries of hatred and guilt, passed from generation to generation, are healed.

[*Read story seven, 'Reconciliation through Forgiveness', page 51*]

▼

Step Eight

PASS IT ON

*As one of many already on this road,
to pass on my own experience of
change.*

There are more unsung saints in the world than we realise. We are not alone — far from it. There is always a helping hand. And to see others find new hope as we share our lives with them gives meaning to all our discoveries — they are not meant to be kept to ourselves, but passed on.

From the beginning we can 'pass it on'. This isn't convincing others into what we feel is best however, as if we personally are in charge of saving the world! No-one is interested anyway in being talked down to. It is the sharing of our own past and present needs, our ongoing change in the midst of the successes *and* failures, that builds the trust where others feel they can also talk openly.

'Passing it on' is the fruit of our times of solitude with God when we begin to live into the cost of the way we have lived. Creative ideas and actions blossom as we see one person always makes a difference, that we can always make a new start.¹

The answer for the world is an answer forged out of 'ordinary' people just like us. Multiplied, such grassroots change can change the world. There is always hope. Like ripples flowing outwards in a pond,

¹See 'Ideas for Initiatives', page 67

STEP EIGHT

the committed few can have an effect for good way beyond their numbers.

This does not mean there is no struggle — rather we take on a greater struggle. Working together, and as equals sharing our lives together, is essential.¹ Alone it is just not possible to bring lasting change, either in ourselves or in the wider world.

There is a peace and purpose and joy that the world can neither give nor take away. This comes from the certainty that we are at the heart of God's will for us, and by God's grace leaving the world a better place than we found it.

'God has a plan for the world, and we have a part.'
'God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.'
These have proved true statements. Whether known or unknown, whether in comfort or in the midst of suffering and poverty, whether young or old — we can learn to depend on God alone, to realise our unique part in remaking the world. Nothing less is adequate if all are to have food, work, and a purpose for life: the *end of survival and beginning of living*.

[*Read story eight, 'The Second Mile', page 55*]

¹See 'Spiritual Cell Groups', page 68

PART TWO

EIGHT STORIES OF CHANGE

These life stories, presented anonymously, are of 'ordinary' people. They cross all barriers — of age, sex, class, creed, race and nation. None claim to have 'made it', but taken together they present the hope of a new world already coming to birth.

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Story One

MY NEED FOR CHANGE

Despite the difficulties, she always coped on her own. Now she sees her need for change.

My childhood as I recall was a happy one, even though I realise now it was a hard time for my parents. Mum and Dad lost their home and possessions during this time — it was a family saying that every time the rent was due we made another move.

Ours was not a religious family, my brother and I attending Sunday school only I think because it was considered the 'correct' thing to do. My father played the piano and organ very well having played in his local church in his younger days, but he had lost any religious teachings he had had. My mother's family had no spiritual calling.

In my teens I would often attend church with a girlfriend and I can remember thinking what an inner peace some of these people seemed to have and I really envied them for it. But I could not seem to find it for myself.

I married in my early twenties and became absorbed with raising a family and helping my husband to build our home and once the children were a little older going back into the workforce to help with finances. Weddings and funerals were my main contact with the church, or indeed with things spiritual.

I really felt during this time that despite the usual problems associated with rearing my family and day to day living, I was coping reasonably well on my own.

MY NEED FOR CHANGE

I wasn't looking for change, least of all in myself.

Some time later, through my son I took part in 'Return Trip', a play about a drug addict who finds a faith. I remember gathering with the other members of the cast for prayer before we went on stage and having a wonderful feeling that God was truly with us. Instead of feeling frightened as before I was completely at ease and at peace. This in itself had a profound effect on me.

Years later, on the advice of a friend who was in a similar situation, I went to an Al-Anon meeting. These are regular meetings for the families of those in the grip of alcoholism. My husband, who had always enjoyed his alcohol, was now having a real drinking problem and I hoped to find some answers, not only to why my husband had developed this problem, but also how other family members had found a way to cope.

I attended many meetings and it proved to be a real healing programme, not only to understand that alcoholism is a disease, but also that with some spiritual help this could be overcome. I was to learn that if I was willing to listen and ask for God's help instead of trying to do it all on my own answers would come, and they did.

I learnt I have no control over the alcoholic, but that I do have control over my own reactions. I learnt the need to let go and let my husband make his own mistakes — the one I am responsible for getting sorted out is myself! Also in listening to others' stories I realised I was not alone and that others were usually a lot worse off than me.

Later my husband became a member of AA. It presented a whole new way of life. It was an answer to

MY NEED FOR CHANGE

prayers — not only for myself, but also for him, for he had suffered in the later years, not only physically, but also in mental anguish.

I attended many meetings with him and could feel the hand of God reaching out and touching us all in the same way I had felt back in that play so long ago. Gradually this brought a spiritual change — really more so in him than in me.

Since then my husband and I have been attending our own weekly meetings with other members of our family and friends, seeking to bring about change in our lives. Particularly I have found looking at character traits — like fear, pride and anger — helpful, realising the character defects that are there, and that something can be done about them.

I have also found the joy of sharing a quiet time each day with the God of my understanding and feel I am slowly beginning to change and am more at peace with myself and tolerant of others. I am learning to appreciate all the things that happen each day, the big and the small, the good and the bad, knowing that with God's help I will be able to handle any difficulties.

It becomes a release to know that you can change. After a while it becomes second nature. For example I now find with my second lot of grandchildren more patience, and am receiving a real response. Before, with my first grandchildren, I think I felt a resentment for their call on my time.

In recent years I have also begun to be interested in the environment and the cost of the way we are living. In my own small way I am trying to be more aware. As a housewife this affects what I buy in the supermarket, and recycling what I can. We even have little

MY NEED FOR CHANGE

stickers around the house reminding us to turn off the lights and taps!

In looking back, I realise now that living could have been much more fulfilling and peaceful for myself and for my family. Indeed my life has been governed by my strong desire to appear acceptable in others' eyes and conforming to what appeared to me to be the 'normal' pattern of living.

I'm still a person who feels on the edge a bit, that I haven't still fully committed myself. But even realising the need for change is a step forward as I had always imagined myself to be fairly self-sufficient and able to manage my life. I now know to lead a really fulfilling life, you cannot do it alone.

Story Two

ALL THE DIFFERENCE

*Early in their marriage they learnt
God has a plan for their lives. This
made all the difference.*

I have been married now for twenty-two years. We live in Holland with our three sons. I have been an officer in the Royal Netherlands Navy for most of this time.

I grew up in an environment where the church was a natural background element to my education. Sunday school, Bible class and occasional church visits were part of my youth, although not very prominent and certainly not always to my pleasure. This started to change during my initial years in the Navy. I gradually came to appreciate the ecumenical church services on board and became good friends with the chaplain.

My wife grew up in a similar situation, except for the last year before we met when she got involved in a musical show called 'Sing Out Netherlands '66'. Bringing a message of hope and inspiration to a receptive audience was not only an exciting experience, but also opened her mind to such basic questions as: 'what am I living for; what is my responsibility in creating a better world; how can I help to break the chain of hate that divides people and nations?' This was one of the reasons why she made such an impression on me — I was not used to thinking with such a global perspective.

Although we got married in church, faith and

ALL THE DIFFERENCE

religion did not play an important role in the first years of our marriage. Our life was mainly occupied with career, children, friends and our house. We could cope rather well although in retrospect the number of occasions increased where we felt unhappy, bored or jealous. After a few years we started to feel that something was lacking, something that could give meaning to our existence and direction to our marriage.

Throughout this period my wife had remained in distant contact with some of her 'Sing Out' friends. In search for more depth in our life, we started to go to meetings and other occasions more frequently.

I felt very much at home from the beginning. There was a special atmosphere of people who had a worldwide perspective unhampered by narrow boundaries, and with an inner preparedness to be available for whatever task God called them. I felt encouraged and inspired and also a bit challenged.

Later we went to an international conference centre for Moral Re-Armament in Caux, Switzerland. Here was that same special atmosphere and also the same feeling of challenge, only stronger. It was as if I was coming to the point that I had to make a choice — either to participate fully or to leave.

At a certain point I felt slightly depressed by this situation and wanted to leave. My wife's reaction was a simple proposal: "Why don't you first go to the kitchen and see if you can help!" Ten minutes later I found myself sitting at a large table with a mixed group of people — men and women, young and old, black and white. Immediately I felt involved and responsible, and the depression left me.

From then on I participated fully, listening carefully, and asking many questions. Most important

ALL THE DIFFERENCE

seemed the idea that people can be instruments in God's hands; that He has a plan for our lives and that it is up to us to search for that plan by listening to Him and obeying Him.

My wife and I decided to try and take regular time to listen in quietness to God, to His voice in our own heart and mind, and by so doing to find His calling for us personally. We also decided not to tell anyone so that it would be easier to stop if we did not like it after all!

We soon found out however that this new practice deeply affected our lives. One of the first steps was apologising to a good friend for unjustly insinuating financial wrongdoing. Not only was the air cleared and our friendship restored, but also I received a new sense of freedom and the conviction that similar situations on a larger scale could be cured if people dare to admit what they have done wrong and apologise for it. Forgiveness and reconciliation became a reality to me.

About half a year after this decision something happened that also has been very important. An American couple stayed with us for the weekend. We had a marvellous time together, going on bicycle tours, having long and deep talks and many laughs.

On the last morning my American friend and I took time to listen to God together. When we shared our thoughts he asked me whether I had ever been completely honest with my wife. That question had quite some impact. I knew he was right — there was something from my past that I had kept for myself because I had not had the courage to talk about it.

A couple of days later my wife and I had a very open and honest conversation with each other — not easy,

ALL THE DIFFERENCE

but in retrospect it put our relationship and our lives on a fresh course which gradually strengthened our mutual love and respect. It also provided us with a better understanding of each other's shortcomings and mistakes, for which we learned to ask forgiveness, so that our relationship towards God and towards each other could be purified time and again.

This experience made us look with fresh eyes at our own family and made us aware of the importance of the family in general as the cornerstone of society. Together with friends we initiated a series of conferences and meetings in which we discussed various elements of the family. We talked about our own experiences, our failures and victories, based on the practice that neither parents nor children, but 'God is in charge' of the family (as one of our sons once remarked when he did not agree with something his parents had decided!)

These conferences continue until the present day and have influenced many families around the world. Only recently I was able to share these experiences with several groups of Polish families.

Although the frequency and duration of our 'quiet times' is often very insufficient, and although we have never had a very clear sense of God speaking to us specifically, it has changed our life a great deal. It has not only given us a much better insight into our own shortcomings, but also made us aware of the steps to take in order to restore and reconcile what went wrong because of our mistakes. Searching for God's guidance has become an integral part of our life.

Having said all this, I realise that trying to search for God's guidance and plan for our lives by no means

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is a guarantee for an easy or successful life. There are failures and mistakes, often caused by ourselves, by our own egotism, our lack of love and dishonesty.

Maybe the difference is that we are better aware of that; that we know from experience how hurt disappears when we have the courage to ask for forgiveness for what we did wrong; that we have discovered there is a source of greater wisdom outside ourselves which is there to help us back onto our feet and guide us. Being aware of this difference makes all the difference!

Story Three

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

She hid from life behind religious activity. Forced to take a good look in the mirror, she is now finding 'the pearl of great price'.

I was brought up in a family of four. Both my parents were involved in fulltime Christian work. One of my earliest memories is of sitting together as a family each morning to have 'quiet times' and share our thoughts together.

As a child I was quick to choose the safety of a special relationship with my father and to conform to rather than confront the control and temper I feared. With my mother I was prepared to depend on her, and then later in life on other 'substitute mothers', refusing to grow up. On them I would periodically unburden my guilty conscience.

My parents' approval came to mean everything to me. When I was 17 my mother wrote a beautiful poem for my birthday. It spoke of my having discovered the 'pearl of great price' — however I knew I hadn't. I felt I could never live up to their high expectations of me. It hurt, and it was painful to face that hurt, so I buried the poem in a drawer. My own fear of being rejected by friends at school — because of my religious background — was compounded by not feeling accepted for the real person I was at home.

When I left school I chose the easy route to follow my parents and brother into the same spiritual work. It involved going to a training centre which was like a

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long holiday. I loved the social life, and took the things I wanted out of the time.

At this point a good friend confronted me with the truth: that my driving ambition was to be central and popular and unless I surrendered this to God, I was unreliable. It was God speaking to me through her, but I chose to ignore the warning, and got on with life as best I could.

There followed twelve years of fulltime Christian work. On the outside life appeared good. I kept busy with masses of letter writing, visiting, and generally conforming to the expectations of those around whose opinion mattered. But life inside was increasingly a strain as I pretended more and more.

At 30 I got married. I tried to transfer all my unresolved life strategies on to my husband but it didn't work. I was suddenly accountable, and there were no back doors left.

At first I couldn't believe I'd been so far off-track. I was self-righteous and arrogant, and thought myself superior to my husband, who was 'newer to the faith'. Before we were married my husband had shared very honestly with me, but I genuinely felt there was no major area of need in my life. In fact, though I had been periodically measuring my life against moral standards since teenage years, they had been surface checks only. My life was superficial and shallow. I couldn't relate on a deeper level.

There followed some very unhappy times and my husband went through much anguish. It was by God's grace he stuck with me through all the tantrums of shocked self-will, and kept demonstrating an alternative life of God's freedom.

One and a half years later an aunt lovingly pin-

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pointed the truth: that I was living for no-one but myself. This was the beginning of a realisation that the whole deeper area of seeking popularity, which was the driving thrust of my life, was still totally untouched and unsundered. It was at this point things slowly began to turn round and make sense. I asked God's help to start again.

Looking back I see I got caught up in a counterfeit religious life which is truly hell to live. Because I hadn't gone the whole way with God, I was constantly haunted by fears and guilt. I began to call my own self-will or what I thought other people expected of me, 'guidance from God'. With a dangerous lack of thinking or questioning, I also relied increasingly on friends to make decisions for me.

Now eight years down the track, it's been a slow, step by step road back to reality — above all to knowing a friendship with a loving God. It is this one relationship that I'm discovering is the key to the real life, and which gives order to every other relationship. The more I know Him, the more God is giving the courage to know myself — and to accept Christ's forgiveness and healing, one day at a time. It is He who is unearthing the still buried 'onion skin layers' and healing the things I cannot.

For me, Bible study and involvement in the local church are a lifeline. Also to meet and share weekly with others more than anything is helping me to know how to keep on changing. I am beginning to accept that I need others' help to remain vulnerable, to be kept real and down to earth, and that I don't need to feel threatened or defensive.

It's been important to accept myself as I really am — no veneer or masks — and, importantly, to learn to

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laugh at myself. As others share their own struggles in life, I feel accepted. What a relief to know I am nothing unique, neither better nor worse than others, and am but a fellow pilgrim along the road of life.

Practically these days have more of an easy flow to them — there is less strain. I'd like to live life now in no other way. Though I cannot undo the past, nor undo the pain I caused, I am glad now to be able to perhaps warn and encourage others. Especially I'd like to pass this on with my husband to our children. This is the 'pearl of great price'.

Story Four

BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

Key in his fight with alcohol was honesty. Once an active communist, he is now refinding his part in building a world where 'all men will brothers be'.

My story starts as a youth of eighteen when I was interested in all around me. In those times money, work and in fact most things were scarce. I had a job in the electrical industry as a process worker, and from there I travelled daily by public transport to technical college on the way home. I had to leave home before six in the morning, returning late at night most days.

One of my interests was the welfare of the poor and lack of basic needs for the people, and the power the wealthy had over them. It led me to becoming an ardent socialist and eventual communist party member.

Although I was a practising Christian at this time it became more and more difficult to reconcile the path the church trod with the underdog. Rather they seemed to favour the wealthier section of the community, forgetting Christ's teaching in this regard. I drifted out of the church, finding the bandaid approach to the world's problems as a totally inadequate sop to wealth and keeping the status quo. Further, the fact that there was a God making note of every little mistake I made, and that I would have to answer for them eventually, was not in the end my idea of a loving God.

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It was in this era of my life that the second world war started and all hell broke loose. No-one was able to do any planning of any sort for a future, if in fact you were going to have a future at all.

I became very involved in organising a youth club of about two hundred members, and whilst in the main it provided sporting and social activities it also took part in the war effort. But for me behind all these activities was the theme of a better world tomorrow, a socialist world in which the need for wars would be a thing of the past, and where the poor would not be the ones to cop the rough end of the stick all the time.

I will note here that I used to have the odd drink of alcohol as it suited me and at the time it did not create any great problem. I found that its effect on me was magic. It made the shy introverted me into an outgoing personality, capable of addressing union meetings and the like, and able to dream to some purpose and above all become effective in what I did — or at least it felt that way. I in fact enjoyed its company and the company of those I met through it, from factory workers to company managers.

After the war I became more dedicated to my cause and money played little part in it. I was one of the founder members of the draughtsmen's association and was generally fighting for better conditions for workers, seeing that a just and equitable wage was paid for the amount of work done.

I married in 1948, and from here on I suppose you might say that I was bound hard and fast to a commitment to providing the necessary for a wife and family. In fact I did drop out in a sense, because I needed every bit of money for building our house, vowing never to become entangled with the banks or lending

institutions. Many years were involved in doing this.

During this time and being a bit of a handyman it was my way to see a usable value in virtually all we no longer had a use for. I reached the point where I did not put out a garbage bin for a period of about ten years. It made me feel good to recycle so much although in those days I tended to be treated as a 'weirdo'. I now very much see the wasteful habits we have developed in the Western world have to be completely eliminated if poorer nations are to get an existence of any sort. In fact time is fast running out for us all.

My story from here could have been a natural progression to life's completion, but this was not to be so. No doubt as leisure time grew so did my weight to about eighteen stone. I was smoking heavily and drinking more frequently. A specialist told me that I would be dead in twelve months if I did not stop drinking and smoking and lose weight. This I did for twelve months, stopping smoking permanently. My weight dropped to twelve stone and while I stopped drinking for those twelve months I was to drink again.

I had by this time my own electrical engineering business and work pressures became very severe. All my adult life I had used a drink to rid me of the tensions. This worked for many years but as with all aids it requires more and more as your body gets used to it. The result was that I ended up completely addicted to it.

I became an alcoholic as bad as those you see living in the park with sandals and an army greatcoat with a couple of bottles of wine in their pockets, but in

my case it was in the privacy of my own home with its flash bar. I had reached an all time low and would have preferred death to the way I was. In fact I used to pray that I would not come out of one of my binges.

I ended up going to a detoxification hospital where I was made aware of the programme of Alcoholics Anonymous, in which you learn you have progressed to the disease of alcoholism, but that it is possible to recover if you live one day at a time and don't have a drink for that day (since it is the first drink that triggers the craving that is impossible to stop).

The first step of AA is to admit that we are powerless over alcohol, that our lives are unmanageable. Some find it quickly, but it took me quite a long time to admit I was powerless. At the hospital they try by all means to bring you to this rock bottom reality, to deflate the ego sufficiently that you can tell the truth from fantasy — that is, to tell it like it *really* is.

This is the gateway into the spiritual side of this program in which there appears to be a depth of caring and sharing that transcends any normal form of living, and one can only liken it to having found a God of your personal understanding.

The spiritual experience is entirely mystical but it is possible for us to personally make contact with the 'Great Unknown'. In my experience diligent application to the quest, following the basics set down by all faiths, will produce amazing results in which the traveller may experience a way of living that goes beyond his ability to put words to.

Since getting a 'rejoice' on things spiritual in AA I begin to see that the God man quests after is not separate, but part of our everyday living, our environment, and to be lived as part of every single thing we do.

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Hence in AA it matters little what your particular religion is, what your nationality is or the colour of your skin, or whether you are poor or wealthy, famous or unknown — for all can be similarly afflicted with this disease.

At present I attend, and am very much responsible for, two weekly sharing meetings of AA. One is held in the local psychiatric hospital. The other one is in an area full of professional people and managers. When we gather together from such a diverse section of the world, completely equal, humbled and levelled, I begin to see that my misfortune in becoming an alcoholic has in fact brought me full circle in that the aspirations of my boyhood days are indeed alive and well, and will no doubt eventually be fulfilled. As Roberts Burns said:

“Some day the world over,
We’ll brothers be for all that.”

Story Five

THE POWER OF APOLOGY

A simple apology changed the direction of their marriage, and their lives.

I was born in Pretoria in 1903. My father came to South Africa from England at the end of the nineteenth century in a sailing ship. My mother's grandparents came from Germany and settled in the Cape.

I married in 1937. My husband was farming in Southern Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe. We met the ideas of Moral Re-Armament about 1951 through a play, 'The Forgotten Factor'. We were intrigued by the youth of the chorus and the way their faith shone out of them.

Afterwards at a follow-up meeting a Kenyan farmer interested my husband when he said that he had had to put things right with his workers. We were having trouble losing workers on our farm and not having them replaced. My husband was getting a reputation for bad temper. When I heard him losing his temper with the men — whom we called 'boys' at that time — I used to get very scared. I've heard since that he was called 'Nkomo iyahlaba' which means 'the bull that charges'.

Some of those who had come with the play came to stay in our home. My husband and I were honest with each other and I saw that unless we did something we would part. I got such a shock when I heard him say we were on the way to divorce. I knew things were

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wrong but felt we would weather the storm. Also my husband had already been in hospital three times with ulcers and the doctor had said a fourth would be fatal.

But God in His mercy brought us the ideas of God's guidance and the 'quiet time', and those four standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. We got a new concept of what we were living for. How could we care for our country? How could we care for these men who worked for us?

The first thought my husband wrote down in his time of quiet was to apologise to Peter. Peter was a little black boy — around ten — who herded the cattle for us. My husband had lost his temper and had beaten him very severely for letting the cows get into the barn. That is what he had to apologise for. But then he thought of the lost prestige from the older men if he apologised. He thought of the youngster, laughing about it. It took him two weeks to decide to obey, but that obedience transformed his whole life and mine too.

For my part, I told my mother-in-law just what a liar I was and how I'd gossiped in the family and created trouble. With this all in the open, we became new people and God was able to use us in the family and in many situations. We began to see God at work in our lives.

After my husband changed the men called him 'Mahleka' — someone who always laughs. We began to find those who had left wanted to come back. We then began to realise that our black labourers were our friends and not just there for our convenience.

The men had always started the day at sunrise on empty stomachs, so my husband made coffee for them every morning and put in plenty of sugar and milk.

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Then we encouraged them to bring their wives. None of them had their wives with them — we hadn't welcomed women in the compound. The problem then was schooling for the children.

Our poultry man, who had done schooling to grade five, could be spared for a couple of hours. We got a blackboard, some slates and slatepencils, chalk and reading books and he took on teaching about ten farm children which quickly increased to twenty.

Afterwards the Presbyterians started a school but when this closed down, we built our own school. Our son came home for a spell and he and two others on the farm built three classrooms. When the school expanded we used the old farm store as a classroom too. By this time we had 280 children in a school meant for 184!

We also began to take part in conservation of our farming area. Our farm had a river boundary on one side, and flood waters used to wash great chunks away. We went to a meeting of people starting 'intensive conservation areas'. My husband and I decided to visit all the farmers in our area to get their co-operation (only two were against having other farmers telling them what to do!) A conservation committee was formed, and for thirty years my husband worked on that committee.

With others who were finding new life through putting right what was wrong in their lives and seeking God's will, we began to visit trade union leaders, the editor of the newspaper, the mayor and councillors, school teachers — to share what we were discovering. My husband got to know many of the African leaders. Later we got a film projector and films — particularly 'Freedom', a film on reconcili-

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ation between races and tribes — which we showed to schools and missions, and to clubs and to individuals. After showing the films, my husband would often share his story of apology to Peter. God led us into many situations.

Looking back many of our personal friends turned down these ideas. We realised that we had often gone at things like a bull at a gate. One old friend was very angry with me, so that for two or three years we never met. One day I had the thought to go and just be friendly. After a while she said to me: "I don't know what has happened to you but you are much nicer than you used to be!"

As whites, we stayed in Zimbabwe after Independence because we realised what our people had done to the African people, and we wanted to help in the development of this land we love. We felt that God wanted us here. Also we wanted to work for the reconciliation the new Prime Minister was calling for.

Since God has called my husband home, I have had many letters and visits and phone calls from people in many lands, who wanted to honour him. Our black friends spoke at his funeral of what his friendship for many black people had meant for the country.

My husband often said to me that a quiet time and obedience to the thoughts which come from the Holy Spirit are so important. Right to the end he tried to write down thoughts.

God promised my husband and me so much and I see how much He has given, and I am grateful. There is no stopping now, and I'm sure God will give me all I need to carry on.

Story Six

THE GOD SHAPED HOLE

Born with a 'God shaped hole', she has never stopped searching in her quest to know God.

Growing up on a farm in South Australia, which is considered the driest state in the driest continent, was a great experience for me for it was home; a good home where I wanted to stay forever.

Very early on I well remember being laughed at because I was 'different'. I was over-concerned about my family not to mention lots of other people, and animals, which eventually led me of course to wondering what was life all about anyway. I began to feel there was something missing in my life almost as though there was a God shaped hole that nothing could fill.

We travelled six miles on Sundays to church and Sunday school in a trap drawn by two beautiful horses. I began to question God as to whether He really knew what was going on everywhere for surely He was not only concerned about the good white Christian. What about the black races and all the teeming millions of other races and religions and the many who had never heard of Him?

We had no car, telephone or radio but my father was a reader and a thinker so we were kept informed on what was going on in the world. Then another very severe drought, followed by the depression, resulted in bankruptcy for us. Leaving everything we left for the city with little to call our own.

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Eventually the idea of being a nurse came to me and now I believe it was the natural outcome of my concern for my fellow man. Nursing training was a big turning point for me. There were frightening experiences and also funny ones, with good friendships and many valuable times. But there was also more puzzling about life and its meaning — if there was any. Was there even a God if He allowed all this suffering to go on?

At this time some of us young ones used to meet at a milk bar after lectures and there was much talk of what was going on in the world. Many were thinking about life then and I remember an invitation to a meeting which was called 'Common Cause'. I learnt later that it was communist, and many were interested. About that time too, I had another invitation to a meeting of the Oxford Group which 'spoke to me'.

After the final exams and the parting of the ways from two special room mates, I was out on my own. There was war now too and daily news of much of the horror of it all. All the while there was a deepening hunger and yearning for more help and answers for so many in distress. What could I do? Also how was I measuring up?

I did a real 'house cleaning' at this point for there were lots of things in my life I did not like. This meant very costly apologies for my part in hurt relationships, putting right what I could, and even paying back some money to the taxation department an amount for underpayment. This has become a habit for even today if I get a 'nudge', or an uncomfortable feeling over anything, I do what I can to put it right and clear up as I go along. I believe our God guides when we are willing to listen and obey.

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I married and went outback onto a sheep station. It was in war time with lots of shortages, dust storms and real struggles, and here my search really began. With that first beautiful baby, and four more later, I made up my mind to forget myself for the time and do all I could for them and for my husband.

Early on in my time in the outback when I was alone or walking in behind a mob of sheep we would be bringing in for shearing I would feel quite overwhelmed at the immensity of this universe, the wonder of it, the incredible beauty as well as the awful harshness.

We would start work very early in the mornings before the heat of the day, which was hard on us as well as the sheep. At that early hour at the first ray of light and dawn breaking I just knew there was Someone or Something behind the wonder of this creation. There just had to be a reason and meaning for this incredible world we all live in and if He were there He surely had some way of communicating to us. I spent much time in the stillness of the night hours and the early mornings, and still do, to know more of this plan.

Outback people did not talk much about God. We kept Him to ourselves. One day I felt He was saying to me: 'Would you do anything I asked you to?' There was one thing I held back from giving for a while but eventually said: 'All right then, for You could never lead me the wrong way.' This was a turning point for me for I only had to be willing and from then on I was free. The relief too when I came to understand that the very best I could do for my family was to obey God and not wear myself out trying to please people however much I loved them.

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Only with this help was I enabled to go through the years of teaching school to my children by correspondence, and it was a great learning time for me too. There were hardships but also tremendous experiences with all sorts of wonderful characters. Outback people are big hearted and generous.

Through all this, with all the mistakes I know I made, I was always aware of a guiding hand in very real ways on many occasions. Do we have to come to the end of our tether before we really commit our lives to God? For myself I know surely that I cannot handle my own human nature without help for it is easy for me to be judgmental and critical and to be anxious about things.

My husband died relatively young and after my family grew up I moved into Broken Hill, which is a large outback mining town. Later I travelled with Moral Re-Armament and through my time in India, Britain and other places I found, to my delight, the very great pleasure of mixing and meeting with so many people of this world. There are no barriers of language, no generation gap, and I believe no colour, class, race or religion can separate us when we give our Creator His rightful place and say in our lives.

There is so much of material things in the Western world, it has taken away our spiritual appetite to our great loss. I feel a very real need, because of the state of the world, to be more totally God guided for I am sure that is our only hope. With the corruption and wrongs so evident everywhere the only way I can live is through Christ for my family and my fellow man.

These days I am involved in two Bible study groups. Also I have done quite a few lessons in adult literacy

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so I can help others to read and write, and have taught two ladies and now have an Aboriginal boy of thirteen.

All my years of struggle, and it has been very costly and painful, is now producing all I could ever wish for. For me it is a matter of turning to the One who made me — many times a day sometimes — and saying to God that apart from Him I can do nothing. I had to do that all those years in the outback for fortunately I had no one else to turn to, and now it is my most precious possession. The massive search has been a million times worthwhile.

None of us has any control over our backgrounds. We had no say over where we were born or under what circumstances, but we can decide today what we are going to do with this life we have now. We can all do much more than we think we can. Yesterday is past and now is the time to make a new start.

Story Seven

RECONCILIATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS

A career diplomat, he discovered reconciliation through forgiveness.

My father came from the southern part of Laos. He was an adventurer. He went up to the capital city, Vientiane, where he met my mother. I was born in Vientiane and grew up there among six brothers and a sister.

I was lucky to have a mother who was strong inside and peaceful, even though she lost her husband when she was young and never remarried. She got her inner strength from her philosophy of life, her inner peace from her practice as a devout Buddhist.

My father was more serious with me. He kept telling me that Buddhist teachings are a shield against all forms of evil. He told me if you accept them and put them into practice, you will do wholesome deeds and avoid evil.

As I was growing up I didn't catch this very well because I had no direction, no purpose in life. I didn't realise that craving is the source of human suffering. My practice of the precepts of Buddhism grew less. It was more important to me to be known, to be recognised. It was a mistake in my life.

When I got married I thought that being a breadwinner was enough. I worked hard and was involved in many social and welfare activities. But I spent more time with my workmates and friends than with my wife and children, driven by a craving for more suc-

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cess and recognition. I found pretexts to go out by myself, giving the impression that I was always busy.

The harder I worked the less happy I was inside. My wife was lonely and made very unhappy by my behaviour. She was crying while I was out at night, praying that I would find something bigger to live for. She didn't know how to tell me. Her unhappiness confused me. I kept asking myself why I was unable to bring happiness and harmony in my family. I was brought up in a religious surrounding, yet my behaviour had brought nothing but tears and conflicts.

In 1957 I attended a world conference of Moral Re-Armament in the United States. It was the first time that I realised that human nature could be changed, that my habits and motives could be changed if I knew how to listen to my conscience or inner voice based on four absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and that I should start with myself first without waiting for others to change.

One evening, outside the conference hall, I saw the sad face of my wife in the darkness. I thought clearly of something I had done behind her back, which had caused her great suffering. My craving for more popularity and success had led to unwholesome actions, and had blinded me through all these years. I had never admitted my mistakes and wrongdoings, hiding them from family and friends.

I rushed to my room and wrote asking her forgiveness. An Asian man does not find it easy to apologise. It cost me my pride to post that letter. The saying 'big doors are opened on small hinges' was brought home to me. That letter of apology to my wife was the 'small

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hinge' which opened my heart to others and to the world. With a humble heart I asked her to forgive me for what I had done behind her back. And she too asked me for forgiveness for her bitterness.

Since I had the courage to admit honestly my wrongdoings, both of us have been able to share our thoughts, worries and joys through listening to our inner voice on a regular basis, and to work as a team. This has proved to be more satisfying and efficient in dealing with our family and others. I now recall with gratitude my late father's guidance, and hope to be endowed, like my late mother, with inner strength and peace.

In 1975 we went to France because of the war in Laos. Leaving my country was a nerve wracking situation. When your survival is at stake, you can become almost irrational. The only thing we could do was to turn to a discovery we had made years before — that in the silence of our hearts, a wisdom greater than our own can speak. We sat down and prayed for inspiration. We began to conquer the panic.

We saw the communist takeover as inevitable. Vietnamese tanks were already approaching the city. The Prime Minister accepted my resignation. Then we went round warning everyone we could who was also in danger. Finally we saw my mother, who urged us to leave. We gathered our children and fled for the Mekong River, where a boat took us across to Thailand. We found out later that fifteen minutes after we left the house, the soldiers arrived.

To lose our country is something we have to overcome. But I do not see it as the end of things. When we heard of our relatives being killed in Laos we went through agony, but we knew we could never move for-

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ward without overcoming our bitterness and resentment.

After a stay of two years in France we came to settle down in Australia. During our exile we have had a lot of opportunities to share our personal experiences of change. We also had the privilege of holding a meeting of Loatian leaders from different factions at Caux, in Switzerland. At these MRA world conferences living experiences of reconciliation through forgiveness are being shared. We hope there will be many more such opportunities.

We have witnessed many situations where individuals hating one another for years have had the courage, through forgiveness, to break the chain of hate and revenge. Sharing our experiences and sufferings has helped in opening people's hearts to each other. We have great hope for the future.

Story Eight

THE SECOND MILE

He failed to look deeply enough at his motives — a recipe for disaster in marriage. Finding healing, he and his wife are passing on their discoveries.

My story begins in my twenties when I was searching for a purpose in life. Weekend football and films were fine, but Monday mornings adding up figures were like a big brick wall. One Oxford Group film, 'Youth Marches On', gripped my interest and a new friend had the wisdom to suggest that we be quiet together and listen to God.

Like a fish out of water, I wondered whether he meant I would hear a voice in the ceiling. The three thoughts I had seemed ordinary. But when I had the courage to obey them something happened which I had never experienced before. God's power was at work.

It brought reconciliation with my father. An office enemy became a friend. I saw barriers come down as my own pride and fear of people began to break. As I met others in the Oxford Group, I was struck by their warmth of friendship and conviction that God had a plan for ordinary people and a part for them to play in building a new world. My insular life began to open up and war service took me to countries I'd never known before. I loved the excitement of meeting a wider cross-section of people.

Looking back I realise I didn't go deep enough. I hadn't seen the need to look into my own motives: my

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desire for people's approval and the pursuit of success in this new venture of faith. My accounting and auditing background had trained me to look for other people's mistakes and this became a way of life for me. In marriage this was a recipe for disaster.

In the early days of our marriage I deeply hurt my wife in front of many other people. Later I apologised for what I did, but the matter was not fully resolved. We both got on with life and the incident had been 'forgotten'. Neither of us realised how it had caused a build up of mistrust which had started a drifting apart in spirit, leading eventually to things going seriously wrong.

In my wife's words: "A West Indian friend came to stay. We told him nothing of the unhappiness we were going through, but during a chat with the family round our fireside he asked me a penetrating question: 'Would you like peace of heart?' This was the moment when the bluffing ceased. I replied: 'Yes, I would, very much indeed.' Our friend suggested we were all quiet before God. During those few moments I experienced the love of Christ — in that very room I was aware of His Spirit — forgiving the past and giving vision and purpose for the future."

In place of our earlier unawareness this divine love was immediately galvanised into a new concern for the different communities near us which included many of West Indian, African and Asian origin. My wife felt God convicting her to write a play which aimed to unite the host and immigrant communities, and which had this experience of forgiveness as its central theme.

For the next five years the play travelled with a multi-racial cast to areas of Britain with a high immi-

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grant population. As we travelled we all found change. Perhaps those who needed it most were the English of us with our in-built 'we know best' attitudes. The love and quick forgiveness of our black friends helped us with our pride and unconscious superiority.

Alongside the action with the play was a deeper facing up to ourselves — often with the help of our West Indian friend who kept in touch with us. On one occasion he said something which quite unexpectedly touched upon the still unrecognised and unhealed hurts — though he still knew nothing of the initial incident. My wife poured out everything she felt. I could say nothing because of the guilt I felt. We were both in tears and we noticed our friend too wept out of compassion. He did not try to 'help' but sat in silence feeling our misery.

Then he turned to me and said quietly: "But do you see why you said those things?" To my shame I had to put into words what I had dodged doing for years — namely that I had wanted to show off to others present, thereby hoping to win approval. Suddenly as from afar, I heard my wife's voice — now completely different — saying: "Why don't we start all over again?" I knew that the mistrust had been melted and the hurt healed.

This moment was a watershed in my life. Shaken, I knew now that I had to take a straight look at myself, which I'd failed to do before. It didn't happen overnight. But I started to recognise my self-righteousness and ambition. As I was honest about these deeper things in my nature, I began to find freedom.

Some years before my retirement from my accountancy job we began to have a growing conviction that

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we were meant to return to Africa where we had both spent a number of earlier years. The exposure to other races we had had with the play underlined this conviction. Then in a miraculous way I was offered a job in Harare in the newly independent Zimbabwe.

We lived in one of the firm's flats in what had been a white area. Our silver wedding was celebrated there. Several were present at that occasion who my wife had known over thirty years before when living in what was then called Southern Rhodesia. In particular my wife's reunion with a senior African couple who were very well known in Zimbabwe, and their children, had been a moving moment. Here was a family which we felt was again being put in our path by God's hand.

We started to meet with them every Wednesday evening and would talk about the past years. As we talked it became clear that their family life had been damaged in much the same way ours had been. The situation had been corrected, but the mistrust in the family was still there.

We felt a kindred spirit with them as we shared our past failures and the experience of Christ's forgiveness. After a time of listening to God the husband said he wished to speak fully of these matters before his wife and senior daughter and asked us to be present. He was painfully honest with us all — not the custom for an African father. The repercussions affected not only his family but also many others — including white Zimbabweans.

Some time later African friends who had come to our silver wedding said to us: "Don't you find your flat a bit small?" What our friends were leading up to was whether we would like to rent their bungalow in

THE SECOND MILE

Highfield — a black township.

Our first reaction was absolutely 'no'. We did not want to live so far out of town (in the colonial past white areas were built separate from the black). Another more fundamental reason was fear — we would be the only whites among sixty thousand black Africans. What would happen to my wife when I drove off in my car?

Then we realised that this was God's plan taking us into the unknown for His purposes and we decided to go in faith. To our surprise we were given a very warm welcome. As we came up the garden path the hedge parted and our neighbour — a nursing sister — presented a gift of vegetables along with a loud greeting. Next day the neighbour on the other side — a school inspector — called us to the fence and said: "We never want you to feel isolated living here. You must tell us if you ever feel like that."

We stayed in Highfield for two of the most happy and fruitful years we have ever spent. We found our fears unfounded. Our lives were greatly enriched and we felt secure in the love and trust of our neighbours.

We are now back in Britain where our commitment to Africa continues. Many from that continent have stayed in our home including the families to whom we felt God especially led us. These families have proved to be catalysts in the life of Zimbabwe in a way which we could never have foreseen, and their influence continues to be far reaching.

PART THREE

EIGHT AIDS TO CHANGE

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ABSOLUTE MORAL STANDARDS¹

How do I begin?

ABSOLUTE

HONESTY

- * What about taxes? money? bribes? . . . anything I have stolen? Lies?
- * Honesty with myself . . . about motives, feelings, thinking. Do I acknowledge or deny what goes on inside?

PURITY

- * Impure habits? Wrong relationships? Dirty books, films, videos? Trashy thinking?
- * Do I draw people to God, or to myself?

UNSELFISHNESS

- * Who is at the centre of all I do and think? Is it always me first at the expense of my family, my friends, my country?
- * Do I take proper care of myself?

LOVE

- * Anyone I hate . . . or dislike? Or feel superior to? Or just don't care about? Why?
- * Do I love and accept myself? Why not?

¹These standards, found in all faiths, were first used as a summary of Christ's moral teaching by Robert E. Speer in 1902.

AIDS TO CHANGE

CHARACTER TRAITS¹

LOOK OUT FOR —

Dishonesty
Impurity
Selfishness
Hate
Self-condemnation . .
Self-pity
Anger
Depression
Impatience
Resentment
Apathy
Self-justification . . .
Self-importance
Pride
Fear
Worry
Envy
Laziness
Procrastination
Insincerity
Negative thinking . . .
Criticism
Arguing
Prejudice
Giving up

AIM FOR —

Honesty
Purity
Unselfishness
LOVE
Self-valuation
Self-forgetfulness
Compassion
Hope
Patience
Forgiveness
Involvement
Humility
Modesty
Simplicity
Trust
Serenity
Generosity
Order
Promptness
Straightforwardness
Positive thinking
Appreciation
Listening
Friendship
Perseverance

¹Derived from AA literature

A SUGGESTED DAILY QUIET TIME

Find a place and a time to be still.

LOOK UP

Be still and know God. A time to come into His presence, turning our hearts and minds to Him through prayer and reflection on readings. A time to surrender our life and our will over to the care of God as we understand Him, seeking to grow in our knowledge of Him.

LOOK IN

Look behind the masks. A time to think through any immediate actions or reactions. A time for a systematic review of our character and prejudices, discerning more where God's light and healing is needed.

LOOK OUT

View the world through God's eyes. A time to reflect on immediate priorities in the day. A time to bring to God other people or situations that concern us. A time to reflect on our commitment in the light of the needs we see, discerning whether to act or to wait.

LOOK UP

Let go of any sense of strain or burden, and 'let God'. A time to leave the insights we have been given entirely in God's hands, knowing all is well. A time to ask for healing and forgiveness, for clear discernment of His will for us, one day at a time, and for the power to carry out any guidance He may give.

EXPLORING GOD'S WILL

1. *Is the idea morally sound?*
 - * Does it measure up to absolute moral standards?
2. *Is there a difficult choice between two good things?*
 - * Have I talked it over with trusted friends?
 - * Is my vision too small to see the wider view?
3. *Does it really matter?*
 - * Am I continually asking God's will in routine situations when I should use common sense, and trust God to check if I am in error?
4. *Still not clear?*
 - * Am I trying to get God to 'rubber stamp' what I have already decided?
 - * Am I protecting myself from failure and hurts?
 - * Is it the case of an idea whose time has not yet come — i.e. a time to wait?
 - * Am I leaning on others to make my decisions for me?
 - * Am I afraid of making mistakes, or taking risks? (How else do we learn!)
 - * What, or who, is really running my life?
5. *Am I seeking to grow spiritually?*
 - * Am I taking the time each day to know God more?
 - * Am I seeking to practise God's presence in all my affairs?

QUOTES

- * Human nature can be changed — that is the root of the answer. National economies can be changed — that is the fruit of the answer. World history can be changed — that is the destiny of our age. (Buchman)
- * God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. (AA prayer)
- * Things of fundamental importance to a people cannot be secured by reason alone. They have to be purchased with their suffering. (Mahatma Ghandi)
- * If you judge people you have no time to love them. (Mother Teresa)
- * More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. (Tennyson)
- * Let gratitude for the past inspire us with trust for the future. (Fenelon)
- * Lying to ourselves is more deeply ingrained than lying to others. (Dostoevsky)
- * One word of truth outweighs the world. (Solzhenitsyn)
- * God has created you as originals; don't let society turn you into copies. (Sparre)
- * The time is ripe for an appeal to the hunger for great living that lies deep in every man . . . not a promise of getting something for nothing, but a chance to give everything for something great. (Truman)
- * There is one thing that is stronger than armies — an idea whose time has come. (Hugo)

IDEAS FOR INITIATIVES

Think globally, act locally.

1. *Think globally*

- * What is my vision for what is needed in the world? What needs to be different? Am I part of the cure or part of the disease?
- * Out of the many areas of need in my work, community, city, nation, in the world, what are the one or two that speak primarily to me?

2. *Act locally*

- * Have I got my own life together? What about finances? Is my heart in my daily work and if not, why not? Am I at peace about relationships with family, friends and neighbours? Where I live am I environmentally aware?
- * In those one or two wider areas of need that particularly concern me, what is a practical first step I can take, however small? Is there anyone else I can work with who has similar conviction?

SPIRITUAL CELL GROUPS

Why cell groups?

Too many who are inspired in the midst of a conference or meeting fail to continue afterwards. Though enthusiastic, the pressures to conform back in the local situation often prove too strong.

The need to meet regularly with others — to come to terms with our true selves, with God and with the world in a thorough and ongoing way — is our common human condition. There are many ways this can be done. We can meet one-to-one or in groups, formally or informally. Small sharing groups — or cell groups — are one proven and effective way.

Their primary purpose is to realise God's destiny for our lives right where we live and work. This deals fundamentally with our own character — or lack of it — our need to be whole people. Their ultimate expression is a compassion for others, a vital concern for the world in which we live.

Cell groups always have this larger purpose and setting. Just as a living cell cannot survive alone but rather is in relationship to all around it, so for 'cell' groups. Newcomers are welcome, and there is always a seeking to relate personal discoveries to situations and people around us who are in need.

SPIRITUAL CELL GROUPS

How do they work?

Such groups are open to all and reflect the background and traditions of those who attend. The suggested meeting format and principles for sharing on the following pages mean we share as equals. There is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself to us.

All that is needed to begin is a commitment for two or more people to meet weekly for eight weeks for an hour or two — taking a step of change a week as a basis for sharing — and to take it from there.

After eight weeks we can do something different, or do another round of steps. As we share in this regular, ongoing way so we begin to deal with the deeper issues in our lives, and find the freedom to reach out to others.

SPIRITUAL CELL GROUPS

A suggested meeting format

1. Aim to take time during the week to reflect on a step of change and to bring any insights, questions or thoughts to the meeting. Writing these down helps in sharing. This does not exclude anyone from sharing anything else arising out of our lives.
2. Allow each person to share without comment, and then open to general discussion. Groups should be small enough that all can share.
3. All who wish to lead a meeting should have the chance to do so.
4. The principles for sharing (see page 71) allow a common understanding and trust, and help prevent human nature taking over!
5. When unable to prepare beforehand, a time of quiet reflection at the beginning of the meeting gives space to read the step and write down any thoughts before sharing.
6. If time permits, a character trait (see page 63) can be looked at as well as a step, reflecting on the pattern it has played in our lives. Again it is helpful to write down any insights before the meeting.
7. Aim to allow sufficient time afterwards to talk informally and share news.
8. Within this suggested format, aim to be flexible!

SPIRITUAL CELL GROUPS

Principles for sharing¹

1. We trust one another, knowing that what we share will remain within the group.
2. We accept one another as we are and where we are.
3. We give ourselves and others the freedom to share or to be silent.
4. We are honest with ourselves, telling it like it is, to set free and appreciate the real person hidden behind the masks.
5. We listen to one another, to what is said, and for what is meant.
6. We don't criticise or condemn what is shared; rather we affirm the positive in others.
7. We don't give advice unless specifically requested. God will do the changing.
8. We gather with a purpose and avoid impersonal subjects which can be carried on elsewhere.

¹Derived from 'Pittsburgh Experiment'

FURTHER READING

THE SPIRITUAL WALK

- * **A LISTENING EAR** — listening to God and to people — by Paul Tournier (Hodder and Stoughton)
- * **CAST OUT YOUR NETS** — sharing your faith with others — by Garth Lean (Grosvenor)
- * **GOD CALLING** — a devotional — A.J. Russell (Spire)
- * **THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD**, by Brother Lawrence (Hodder and Stoughton)
- * **THE WAY OF THE HEART** — spirituality of ancient Egyptian Fathers speaking to contemporary man — by Henri Nouwen (Darton, Longman and Todd)
- * **FIFTEEN WAYS TO A MORE EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE** — short guide to knowing God and His will — by Selwyn Hughes (Marshall Pickering)
- * **THE ART OF REMAKING MEN** — by Paul Campbell (Grosvenor)
- * **WHY AM I AFRAID TO LOVE?** — by John Powell (Argus)
- * **MAN AND STRUCTURES** — by Jens Wilhelmsen (Grosvenor)

OXFORD GROUP/MORAL RE-ARMAMENT AND AA

- * **FRANK BUCHMAN: A LIFE** — biography of the initiator of the Oxford Group — by Garth Lean (Constable)
- * **THE REVOLUTIONARY PATH** — MRA in the thinking of Frank Buchman (Grosvenor)
- * **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS** — history of AA through life stories (AA World Services, Inc.)