

GLORY

ON THE INSIDE

3 Special Stories



GEOFFREY C BINGHAM

The Glory on the Inside

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The Glory on the Inside

Geoffrey Bingham

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Foreword

The three stories within this volume have at least one thing in common—they are true. Whilst they bear the marks of the narrator—every story-teller narrates according to his own impressions—they are the substance of life as it has been lived and interpreted by the men and women involved. For this reason they read easily to those who like biography.

At the same time they have something else in common—the life of the supernatural that is lived out in the human scene. It will not take the reader long to realise that the main characters of these biographical tales are people who have kept in touch with the world beyond our human dimensions. One old writer says to God, ‘You have made everything beautiful in its own time, and you have put eternity into man’s heart’. Man is built for relationships which go beyond his limited spatio-temporal universe. He is a creature of high destiny.

There are times in the life of society, as also in the life of the Church, when humanity becomes bland and boring. The usual escape from this intolerable state is to ring the changes on illicit forms of living, on greed, selfishness and human success. It comes to involve experimentation in sex, dabbling in the occult and in esoteric knowledge and religion, and often finds its adrenalin-pushing excitement in violence and the power game. In this highly complex and terrifying world it seems that faith is foolish, and moral living bland.

Foreword

This book—with its three stories—gives the lie to that judgement. God's life lived out in a human being is not merely the hope of the mystic. It is the practical experience—daily—of innumerable men, women and children of faith. They are the simple ones. They are in the Kingdom. Access to this Kingdom is not by human effort but by giving oneself over to grace.

What I am trying to say is that the three stories—if we wish it—can lead us into the true place of human living, the true dimension of human life, the place of man's high destiny. We are saying in other words that man can be revived, and can know the life of the supernatural as it works itself out in human living. The three tales tell us that whilst we are limited, frail, faulty and dependent creatures, we can nevertheless know a rich life.

The purpose of the stories is to revive the tired and the cynical, whet their appetites for a new and fresh experience of God and man, and encourage the faltering to believe God, that He will 'revive His work in the present time' and in doing this 'remember mercy', that is, will not cruelly crush man, but cause his spirit to come to life.

If this were to happen to many personally, then it would help to build a ground swell in the church and in the wider community—modern society. Over the years this has happened from time to time, and always just when it was badly needed. It is badly needed today.

May the three stories—launched on this literary wave—accomplish their goals and help us to fulfill our destinies.

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	v
The Glory on the Inside	1
The Descent of Stephen Stylites	23
Vicki—the Gentle Teacher	59
Vicki’s Vision	62
Her Story	64
A Slim Essay on Death	111
Death Comes So Gently	115
Appendix	117

1

*The Glory
on the Inside*

All human beings look for glory of some kind or another. What they want is generally what they glory in, be it beauty, intelligence, prominence, or just money and power. This story tells of a glory which the possessors could not see as part of themselves. It was a glory beyond themselves, yet working within them.

Perhaps few human beings realise that they were created both to glorify and be glorified, hence they do not greatly concern themselves about these things. One day they suddenly have a sight or revelation of some glory, and it alters everything for them. It can even change their direction in life.

This story you are about to read is so simple. There is no attempt to prove anything by it. In any case no one denies a story. A listener can only deny the application or interpretation put upon a tale, and he has every right to do this. At the same time he can be left with a yearning to have similar things happen to him.

The Glory on the Inside

There were just the two of them in the boat. They had sat for some time, watching their lines drift. Back of them reared the great one-span bridge that marked out their harbour as different from others in the world. To them it was just background. They had long ago ceased to think about it, if indeed they had ever considered it. Now their eyes were idly on the lines, waiting for the flicker which would tell them there was a bite.

She felt the lazy warmth of the summer day, and drowsed in her thoughts. It was good to get away from the Point, if only for a few hours. It was not that she disliked it, but she had not grown up in it as John had. Her eyes flickered over him as he sat bent, intent on the water-line. He was a fine man in every way. She searched around in her mind to discover a word for him. Then, when it dredged up, she was a bit surprised. It was not a word she often used: 'secular'. In fact she hardly knew its meaning. Maybe it had drifted into her from some sermon; now it had returned on time, as a vagrant which is needed.

Secular described him anyway. Not an ounce of religion in him; not a trace of the spiritual. In a way she did not mind. Maybe she was his whole religion. She knew he worshipped her. She filled the gap. They both had the sap of life, still rising, but perhaps not for long. They were nearing middle age. She watched him quietly grip his hand-line, then pull slowly. Suddenly he jerked it. She knew that was to ensure the fish was hooked. And so it was! She was always fascinated by the quick struggle, the loss to the victim, then the sheen of the fish as it tumbled into the boat.

The Glory on the Inside

John cleaned it, rubbing against the scales with his stubby knife. He treasured that knife. When he had gutted it and swept the refuse into the harbour he smiled at her.

‘We’ll manage a meal yet,’ he said with triumph.

She nodded, and after a time had drowsed almost to unconsciousness. Suddenly something snapped. At first she thought it was a line, but both hung slackly. She turned to look at John and saw he was slumped, his head and shoulders forward. She called out to him, urgently, but there was no reply. When she reached him and peered at his face she saw he had gone from her. She really knew it, even before she tested him. Then she knew for sure.

Her first impulse was to scream, but she thrust it back. Not far across the water there were others, fishing. They seemed light years, time years away from her. A great vacuum hung over the harbour. After a time she beat back the panic that was rising, and cried out, ‘Help! Somebody help!’

Those fishing looked up. There was a slight hiatus whilst they drew in their lines. A few of them began rowing, but one vessel with an outboard motor sprang into life, shattering the quiet water, and churning its tiny lapping waves. It seemed like a flash as it arrived. She did not know the man who edged into the boat. He was at John’s shirt, opening it. He was trying to lay him out, and then he shook his head.

‘Nothing will help,’ he said slowly. He looked sad.

She nodded dumbly. ‘Went—just like that!’ she said, and her voice was beginning to tremble. She knew that if she kept talking it would become shrill.

The man shook his head and said, ‘Suffered from heart trouble, eh?’

‘Never had any trouble. Never was sick,’ she said, ‘and he never went near a doctor.’

The man nodded. ‘Sometimes happens like that,’ he said. Then he seemed to come to life. ‘We’d better get him in quick. We’ll tie you on. Might be wrong to shift him. We’ll need a doctor quick.’

Other boats had drawn near. Some of the faces she knew, and she wept when she saw Jenny Keeler.

'The Glory on the Inside'

'Oh Jenny,' she sobbed. 'He's gone. John's gone!'

They let Jenny get into the boat before the outboard motor broke into life again. Then they were away, towing the dead man and the two women. The women were clasped together. The man steered towards the Quay.

She remembered little of what happened then. It was almost a blind memory. There had been the Maritime officials, then a police car, and with it an ambulance. There had been questions. The Point people had gathered there, as if by magic. Somehow the message had spread, but it was when they were back at home that she realised the matter was final. John was in a casket (in those days they called them coffins) and someone had put a bunch of flowers on the polished lid. She hadn't lifted the lid to look at him. They were coming from the funeral directors to do what needed to be done. All she knew was that there was not going to be a post-mortem.

After a time, incredibly enough, there was only little Johnny and, in the shiny box, his dead father, big John. She took out a cigarette and tried to find peace.

That was when the rector arrived. She knew him by sight; she had been at church a few times, especially at christenings. She had thought him a good man, but her neighbours didn't think so. They disliked his puritan ways; at least they thought them to be puritan ways. She had once seen him with his family, and it had been hilariously funny. He had a quick wit and his children had exploded with mirth and protests. She had liked him. A humorous man couldn't be dour.

He was standing in the doorway and she brought him in. His eyes were gentle, but his words were real.

'Real shock, eh?' he asked. 'Just never expect it, do we. Happens when we don't think it will.'

There was nothing preachy in his voice. She had heard that he was pretty fierce at funerals. Never pulled his punches. Always

The Glory on the Inside

said life was serious, death was serious, and that life beyond death was also serious. Now he just looked calm and understanding.

The word came back to her, 'secular,' and she realised John had never thought about death; not, anyway, in the religious manner.

'We were having a quiet day on the Harbour,' she said. 'Then suddenly he was gone.'

'Heart?' he asked.

She nodded. 'That's what the doctor said. He said it was clear-cut.'

'Take him to the Sydney, did they?' he asked.

Again she nodded. 'Gave him a good examination. Reckoned I'd never have got him in. Massive coronary.'

'Pretty young too, eh?' the rector said.

She nodded again. He sat for a time, not saying anything, but she could feel the gentle warmth of the man. 'They've got him all wrong,' she thought. 'He's very kind.'

After a time he talked, but still in that gentle way. He also read from the New Testament, but his voice was natural and sympathetic. She thought the passage was most appropriate, and puzzled why it should be.

He, for his part, thought it strange when asked, after the prayer, 'What's *secular* mean?'

He was a bit startled at first. Then he said, 'It means irreligious, no time for things which are not material. It is a mind without God.'

She nodded. 'John was secular,' she said. 'He was a good man in every way, but he was secular.'

She thought about the pub, the footy, the summer cricket, the gambling, and the life they spent, night after night at some dance-hall or somebody's home. Often as not Johnny would have to go to friends or just play with the kids on the Point.

She let him out and he gave her hands a strong squeeze. She felt near to tears again, and fought not to hurry him out. When he was gone she leaned against the closed door. She knew there was going to be a lot of this in the days ahead.

'The Glory on the Inside'

The funeral was quiet enough. People spoke in whispers. The rector sat with the driver in the hearse. In those days people didn't have cars like they did later. She felt the funeral car was too posh. She wondered painfully what it would cost and then put the idea out of her mind. She knew the folk had had a tarpaulin collection. The wharfies had plenty of money, even if it scarcely lasted the week. The funeral would be no problem for them. Then there would be the pension. She wondered whether she should work or not.

The service was over in the old Gothic church. The wharfies were well-dressed as they bore the coffin to the hearse. Then they were out at the cemetery with its rows of graves. She had been there for other funerals. Everyone in the Point went to everyone's funeral. Now it was John's and they were all there. She just hoped that bunch of old women, crones with talons, wouldn't work up to something before they lowered the coffin. She remembered seeing some of them on such occasions, scabbling in the earth after it had covered the grave.

The rector made sure nothing happened. She wondered a bit at the authority in his voice along with so much tenderness. She was also amazed that his honesty never sounded harsh; his warnings seemed the natural thing for such a time as this.

Then it was over, without scabblings in the earth and shriekings around the cemetery. For some reason they did not—this time—seek out the graves of old friends and spill out their emotions on them. Perhaps it was the hymn that they sang at the last which expended their feelings.

Back at the house the afternoon tea conducted itself quietly. The women handled the hospitality. The rector in his black stock and white rounded collar seemed to keep the drinking in check, although he said nothing about it. When the guests had gone he was still there. His words of prayer and Scripture brought genuine comfort. Dimly she realised that death had opened out dimensions of sight that she had not known. She was thinking things through in a new way. Maybe there was a world beyond John and Johnny, the Point and the weekly pay-packet. Maybe she was the one who had been secular.

The Glory on the Inside

It happened on the first Sunday evening. She rarely went to church and, in recent years, never on a Sunday evening. But here she was, sitting back in the large church and feeling peaceful. She knew her way through the Evening Prayer service. She had known it since she was a girl but in her married years had not bothered to attend. Sometimes she went to the 8 o'clock Communion, or the 11 am Morning Prayer. Now there was something friendly about the evening service. The lights were set half way up the thick stone columns. When it came to sermon time she relaxed back in the pew. Perhaps she would drowse a trifle whilst the minister talked.

She soon found she could not. His preaching was too sincere, too related. It kept pinging against her mind, impinging on her feelings. Still there was nothing hurtful and nothing to alter the web of comfort which was about her. It was at that moment she saw the light or, as she called it in her mind, 'the Glory'. It was around the preacher's head. No: come to think of it, it was all about him, around and down past his shoulders. She blinked her eyes, and shook her head. It had to be an illusion. Any moment it would be gone. It would have passed. Not so; it remained steadily present around the minister.

Somehow it gave new content to his words, new freshness to his voice. The pinging and the impinging went on. Something was moving her: thoughts were coming to life that she had not previously known were there. She shifted a bit in her seat to break the spell; but it was no spell; the Glory kept on being there. She looked around to find out whether others were seeing it too, but no one gave any indication. Finally she settled. She listened to the words which now lacked no power for her. She let them penetrate.

The folk gathered around the door asked her across to the hall for a cup of tea, but she thought she would go home. In any case Johnny was playing with the Carslakes next door. She half dreamed her way through some chatter with Johnny and a cup of coffee. Then she slept soundly.

'The Glory on the Inside'

During the week she heard rumbles about the rector.

'He's crazy,' someone said. 'Reckons he's going to do away with the fete, and the raffles too.'

She'd never liked the fete. It gave her a headache. All the noise, and the rivalry. She was also uneasy about the raffles, although they were a part of the life of the Point.

It was Jenny who got to her about it all.

'Remember,' she said, 'remember when nobody went to the church but a couple of old ladies? You know, old Mrs Kramp, and Grandma Henchley, and a kid or two. The last rector was quite a fellow. Told us to come along and do what we wanted to do. So we came. The church needed money, and we could get it almost any way we wanted to. After all, wharfies earn more than most, and they are generous, especially when it comes to raffles.'

She remembered that, but nothing of it had registered much. Out of loyalty to the Point friends she listened.

'Sadie,' they were saying, almost every day, 'good and all as he is when people get sick and die, he's no good when it comes to understanding us. Too stuck-up, if you ask us. Wants things done his own way.'

After they went she wondered. Maybe his ability to comfort was his limit, but the vision of the light kept coming back to her. Somehow that light wouldn't be there if he was a wrong 'un.

On the Friday he asked if she'd like to join the confirmation class. Without thinking, she said she would. She'd always felt out of it in the Communion service. She had never gone up to the rails, but she liked the service. So she said she would, and when he had gone she wondered whether the others would see this as disloyalty. They did. They kept telling her not to go. She saw the rector walking the street on Saturday and said she would have to think it all over.

Sunday night she sat on the other side of the church. If it was a trick of the electric light then the Glory would not be there. But it was! She felt a flutter in her chest, but stuck it out. When she heard him speak she felt her friends were wrong. She had never seen light around them, nor did she expect to. She felt years of mindlessness

The Glory on the Inside

dropping away from her. On Tuesday she went to the confirmation class. She was surprised by its warmth and intimacy. She had expected heavy doctrine, unintelligible reasoning. It was all so alive that she was disarmed.

When Jenny began her conditioning tirade on the Wednesday she put her off with a lie.

‘I’m just tired,’ she said. ‘Maybe I haven’t got over John’s going. Johnny’s playing up too, without his dad.’

Jenny was a bit scornful. ‘Almost no kid down this way has a dad.’ Then she grinned. ‘Well, not his own dad anyway. You know how it is, Sadie: almost anything goes.’

On Sunday night the Glory was there again. This time the rector was looking a bit tired, even sad. Going out the door of the church she asked, ‘What’s wrong? Something troubling you?’ He said there wasn’t.

Next Sunday he looked pale and his face was set stiffly. To her surprise and annoyance the Glory had gone. He was up there all right—the minister—but he seemed alone, far away from her: distant. He scarcely looked at her as she passed him. Then when she had almost gone he ran after her.

‘Sorry Sadie,’ he said gently. ‘Just not myself tonight.’

‘I know that,’ she told him. ‘The Glory wasn’t there.’

He stared at her for a moment, not comprehending. ‘The glory?’ he asked. Then he smiled tiredly. ‘You’re right. I guess there wasn’t much glory tonight.’

Neither knew if the other understood, or what was really meant, so they parted awkwardly.

Sally Cremer was a tough woman. Her third husband had left her. Also her mind was critical in a bitter way. When Sadie wouldn’t hear her out regarding the rector’s wickedness she set on Sadie.

‘Got a crush on him, love, have ya?’

Sadie was going to tell her what she thought but stopped short. Sally wouldn’t understand. Sally thought she did.

'The Glory on the Inside'

'Purely Platonic, eh dear?' She herself was vague about what Platonic meant, but it had to do with sexlessness as far as she knew.

Sally, however, wasn't convinced. She knew there was nothing Platonic when it came to men and women, even if one of them wore a 'dog-collar'.

Sadie began to understand why he wore the strained look, but the look on his wife's face was worse. Confirmation class seemed to relax them both. Here all were friends, the whole dozen of them, but beyond that twelve everything was enmity. The rumours began to grow. Some of them seemed to have been dredged up from the sewer. Still, she did wonder about the money thing. She went along to the Annual Vestry Meeting and heard them shower abuse on the rector. He wasn't wavering.

'No fete,' he said, and they couldn't shift him.

'No money then,' said Jenny's husband Noel. He was a bit different from the other men on the Point. He was an insurance salesman. The others worked on the wharves and they thought him a bit clever.

The rector looked at them with tired but strong eyes. 'God will bring it all in,' he said.

'And just how will He do that?' Noel asked. The sneer was tucked away in the words.

The minister smiled. 'Just wait and see,' he said.

They wouldn't accept that. They pressed him.

'Look,' he said, a little excited. 'We'll get some unused mustard tins free from the manufacturers. We'll make a slot in them, put a label on them and call the occasion "Temple Day". Trinity Sunday we'll gather them in. It'll work.'

Tropie, who was a large wharfie, was aghast. He forgot church language and used some stuff wholly from the wharf. The rector didn't wince. Once he had been in the army. AIF man, he had been. He just stared at Tropie.

'Give it a go, mate,' he said. 'Just give it a go.'

The Glory on the Inside

They couldn't fight that idiom and after a time they left. But they talked for weeks when the little tin cans went out with their white and blue labels. 'He'll be down the drain if the money don't come in,' they said. Only old Mottie believed it would work, and that made them uneasy. Mottie was a hard case, but he had a sixth sense, and it always worked out. This time they thought (hoped) he would be wrong.

'He'll show you,' said Mottie. 'You see if he don't.' Mottie was the church-warden, but not for money. He just loved the verger's gown, and of course he got pickings at the rare wedding or two.

The smear campaign hotted up. Sadie realised after a time that she would have been in it had it not been for the Glory. Some nights it was there, some nights not. Once or twice she would say, 'There was Glory tonight'.

He would look puzzled and nod, but say, 'Felt things were good, all right. Better than last Sunday.'

She knew that last Sunday there had been no Glory. Sadie knew that if it hadn't been for the Glory she would be rebelling also. He wasn't all that diplomatic when he preached, but after a time she wouldn't have him be, either. When she saw his pregnant wife looking depressed she thought he ought to hit back a bit. He never used the pulpit for that, when she thought he might have. It was curious how they came expecting him to do it; but he didn't and that made them madder than ever.

Just before Temple Day he looked all in. It was after the Tuesday confirmation class. He was not only tired but a bit grim. She remembered the comfort he had given her, and his eagerness when he taught the group. Now it was dissolved in a dark cloud that seemed to be all about him.

'If only you could have the Glory in the day, or even on week-nights,' she said to him.

He stared uncomprehendingly. 'You mean the kind of joy and power we feel in the Sunday night services?'

She stared back at him. 'No,' she said, 'I mean the actual Glory. The Light that is all around you when you preach.'

'The Glory on the Inside'

He gripped her right arm, and his fingers were like steel, his grip like a vice. 'What light?' he demanded. 'What glory?'

She told him. At first something like disbelief was in his eyes, and it gave way to a sort of terror. Then his fingers relaxed and he looked at her, somewhat sideways.

'Are you given to this sort of thing?' he asked. 'Are you psychic, or anyone in your family?'

She thought about her family. Not too much imagination there. Men with their noses to the grindstone, the women with theirs to the washtub. Nothing fancy about any of them. She shook her head.

As he stared he suddenly realised how softened she had become in the face. The women of the Point had a look you could pick out anywhere. It was a semi-cynical and 'I expect nothing' look. Sadie had had it too, but it was gone. He was amazed he hadn't noticed the change before.

He said slowly, 'Tell me about this Glory again'.

So she did. She saw the tiredness vanish, the darkness dissolve, the tension dissipate, and the old smile returned, the one he used to have along with his old humour.

'Well, what do you know!' he said. After a long silence he told her never to tell anyone. 'Don't tell me either, when it happens,' he said, 'and especially don't say anything when it doesn't happen.'

Temple Day the church was crowded at the one morning service. For once the 8 o'clock Communion was cancelled. They had agreed to this, with the exception of Mrs Kramp and her bosom friend, but they did not stay away in protest. The choir had even practised an anthem which wasn't prior to the nineteenth century. It almost sounded modern, but not quite.

For a man whose doom had been prophesied for this day, the rector was looking pretty spry. The wardens had arranged to take the offertory between the two sets of prayers—the praise and the petitions—so that they could count the money before the service closed. Everybody was for this innovation, and the rector seemed to take more time for the sermon, maybe to give the counters the full time they needed. Noel and Tropic whispered something about the time not being needed, but the hymn after the sermon was also

The Glory on the Inside

finished before the men emerged from the vestry. They handed a note to the rector.

He betrayed nothing. He went back to the wineglass pulpit. Announcements were better there than from the chancel steps. Everybody heard. He asked a question.

‘What was the total sum that came in for last year’s fete?’

‘Two hundred and one pounds, fifteen shillings and tenpence,’ said Mottie in his heavy voice.

There was a bit of a throb in the congregation. The Point people were never going to give that amount without a lot of pre-fete raffles, and competitions of guess-the-weight, guess-the-number, and guess everything at the fete itself, to say nothing of the goods scrounged from manufacturers, threatened storekeepers, and the like. Two hundred and one pounds, fifteen shillings and tenpence was nothing to be sneezed at by their hoity-toity rector.

They searched his face for disappointment but there was none. Nor was there any sort of gleam in his eye, so they held their breath.

‘Really,’ he said quietly, ‘there was no work put into this venture whatever’.

‘How right he is!’ they thought. ‘No work, no money.’

He coughed slightly. ‘That is if you don’t count prayer as work.’

They let that dig pass by. No one on the Point was silly enough to think prayer would accomplish anything. Prayer was all in the mind.

‘The total,’ he said quietly, ‘is two hundred and ten pounds, and fifteen shillings’. There was an amazed gasp. The rector nodded. ‘That’s great,’ he said simply. He looked towards the wardens.

‘They have asked me to tell you that quite a number of boxes are outstanding, so the final total should be much higher than it is now.’

The last hymn was ‘Now Thank We All Our God’ and the congregation was honest enough to join in with zest. Old Mottie was seen muttering to himself and looking around with knowing glances at his friends and enemies. Noel and Tropie got out before the time of handshakes at the door. Others just capitulated.

'The Glory on the Inside'

Jenny said—probably for the rest of the women—that she had taken part in the last fete she would ever be in. 'Break your back,' she said. 'Crazy, it was. All that jealousy and cursing and rivalry, and this man says do nothing and it comes in.' She shook her head as one who had been deceived.

Outside they chattered noisily, a whole spate of surprise getting free on the front lawn of the church and spilling over on to the footpath. Something had changed at the Point. Sadie knew that the Glory had broken through, even if they weren't realising consciously that that was what it was. She was also marvelling at the memory of John being secular, because that was what they had all been. The bit of church-going any of them had indulged in was a bit of left-over culture from the early days, imported from old Britain with convicts and settlers. Besides, the great Gothic building of the church had overhung the whole Point and, silent though it was, it had been a background to their thoughts. Now it had become more than a church building. Temple Day had spoken to part of their secularity, and their minds and spirits were swivelling towards God.

As the months went by, and then a year or two, Sadie still marvelled. The rector and his wife had, so to speak, been launched. The look of strain had disappeared, and there was a new note of strong joy in their voices. The confirmation class increased in numbers. The Archbishop came to confirm them—a large man who carried immense dignity and gentleness. He had lifted his black Homburg to Sadie and the ladies, to Mottie and the men, and had proceeded into the church. They found he favoured their rector and had decided he was the man for the Point, so they immediately accepted him, and loved him insofar as they knew how to. When the confirmation service was over they decided to stay on as a group to share the new truths that were breaking through to them.

But it was about the Glory that Sadie marvelled. After Temple Day she did not see it again, at least for a long time, but its non-appearance did not disturb her. In a way there was a fair amount of

The Glory on the Inside

glory in the congregation. The days of human secularity had given way to new days of heightened spirituality, not that she would have used this particular word to describe it. There were still wrangles; some were reluctant to let the old ways go. Some loved what was happening but they carried a kind of despairing fatalism with them. They felt that nothing could change permanently in the Point; it was doomed to a certain mind-set and lifestyle, and the present change could only be temporary. The group of fatalists after a time began to dwindle.

It was about that time that the first official deaconess came. The Archbishop had reckoned the rector needed the kind of help that Trudi Jeffries could give, but when she came she was shy, single, unsure of herself, and a bit awed by the rector and the team of workers which had grown around his ministry. For some weeks she felt like an outsider. It was Sadie to whom she went, and on whose shoulder she wept, so that their friendship was cemented. Sadie would have her around each Wednesday evening for a meal before the ladies' meeting. Young Johnny worshipped her.

Then a year later the thing happened, the event which surmounted two successful Temple Days, the Bible class, and anything else which had surprised and gripped the Point. The first part of the happening had to do with the rector and his wife. What it was no one ever quite knew, but it was as though a new man mounted the pulpit one Sunday. His old fierceness was gone, but with its going a new authority and power had come. If he was more gentle he was also more insistent. What he said cut with the edge of a prophetic sword, and for some it was frightening. Again there was a group who bucked, but this time Noel and Tropie were not amongst them. Even so some folk drifted away, out of their temporary reformation, back into their innate secularity.

The rector's wife was different. She had a new, fresh acceptance of the Point and its inhabitants. Suddenly the distance between her and the people had diminished; indeed it had vanished. She and Trudi became close friends and Sadie and some others of the women were linked in a new way. The congregation began to flourish. People came from different places in the city and suburbs.

'The Glory on the Inside'

The services throbbed with a richer warmth and vibrancy than they had known.

Sadie remembered the night he had preached, and the different note in his voice, and the new fresh light in his eyes. His preaching was wholly uncalculated. It had a freedom about it which had nothing of wildness in it. It was strong and deliberate. When the service finished there were pools of tears on the floor. The congregation was ready to move out, for the benediction had been given, but there were some who did not want to move. They wanted to stay and pray; so all stayed, and for the first time in many decades the church was stirred by the simple cries of people, the first articulate prayers to break beyond the normal liturgies it had known. Finally they left the building in silence.

He stood at the door, speaking quietly to them as they left. Trudi came up to him, her eyes filled with tears. She passed through the doors on to the front path. He was about to return to the vestry when she broke through the doors, leaving them swinging.

'Oh!' she cried, using his Christian name, 'Oh! they are just talking about ordinary things out there!' She threw herself at him, buried her head in his surplice and began to weep. 'They can't!' she said, 'they just can't'.

A year ago he would not have fully understood, but now he did. He knew why it shocked her that some could talk about the weather, and some about the footy and others about local happenings. It seemed incongruous to Trudi that after such a service people could drift to the mundane. Yet he knew that some of them were too shy to be articulate. They had sought normality in the trifling things, but that did not mean they had not been moved. Later he would be able to convince Trudi of this, but not now. Even at the rectory when he and his wife comforted her, they did not explain anything of this. She for her part did not want to sip tea. She had seen something that night which had utterly transformed her. The shining of her eyes, and the glowing of her face, and the strong vibrancy of herself was a simple but beautiful miracle to behold, and the two of them absorbed it joyfully.

The Glory on the Inside

When Trudi had gone they looked at each other. She said, 'This is different. This is a miracle.'

'It's different all right,' he agreed. 'Nothing will ever be the same again.'

Whatever his ministry had triggered off in these difficult years was nothing to the transformation of Trudi. Doubtless there was a touch of superstition, and even of good awe, when they started calling her 'the Angel'. Gentleness, tenderness, and love exuded from her, but it was wholly unconscious. She also had a strength and determination which had not been part of the young woman who had wept on Sadie's shoulders. The women began to live around her. They saw that something had broken into the Point which was wholly new to them. Much as they had—at least some of them—appreciated the teaching of their minister, it was the reality of it which came through this woman that stirred them. There was hope now which could break the fatalism of generations of Point secularity. She had broken out of a dead, even life into a beautiful reality. They had enough sense not to canonise her and thrust her up on to some pedestal. Her clear honesty and simple sincerity broke the cynicism of their anger, and the aridity of their hopelessness.

Strangely enough they did not fear that her joy and assurance would be temporary. They had an instinct for the truth, and they clung to that. Sadie too was an insistent disciple of the new order. She went amongst the women, and even amongst some of the men, pressing the validity of the change. Those who adopted a 'wait and see' policy just did not wish to be disappointed. They had memories of a rector who had hanged himself, a rector's wife who had gone off with a church-warden, the other angry broken servants of God who had slipped away like disappointed ghosts as the grim traditions of the Point had beaten them. The tragedies had to be wiped out by a revelation of love and joy, and Trudi was doing this without even knowing she was.

'The Glory on the Inside'

When the parish farewelled the rector with his wife and children, they knew he was not leaving in order to escape from them and the pressures he had known. No one even imagined he did not want to stay, but recognised his call to missionary service, and the church was jam-packed at the valedictory meeting. The hall was also crammed with well-wishers. Old Mottie surpassed himself in the send-off speech the parish had appointed him to make. There were statements by the Archbishop's representative, and other clergy who were the rector's friends, and it was all nectar to him and his family. There were gifts and well-wishes, and promises of prayer so that the family was swamped with support and assurance.

Best of all were the few minutes he had with Sadie. They left the crowd and went to the vestry, and it was gentle and quiet in the old room. He was tired and she was calm. He thought how she had changed. Whilst Trudi had a shining joy, this one had a quiet depth of calm humanness. She was very much down to earth, but—to use her own language—not secular. His theological explanation was that she lived in the truth of creation. She was a person who was unashamed to be human.

She said, 'I wanted to tell you something before you left, so that you could always remember it'.

He nodded.

She went on. 'It seems like centuries since I was in the boat that Saturday morning on the Harbour.' There was no pain in her eyes, nor had he expected there would be.

'John and I were secular—both of us—but then you changed it all for me. It happened when I saw the Glory.' She saw his eyes widen with reawakened interest, as he recalled her first mention of it. Then she added, 'I never really told you the full story. I used to sit in the church and see this great golden glow around you. It was on you and about you, and the only times it was never there were when you were angry at something people had done. Those times your words were apart from the Glory.'

She saw the growing amazement in his eyes as she continued, and the shake of his head in astonished unbelief. She knew he did not really reject what she was saying, so she kept talking.

The Glory on the Inside

‘The Glory was like that right up to the first Temple Day, and then after that I never saw it but once, and that was the night the church changed, the night Trudi became a new person.’

All this made sense to him. For a moment he was wistful about the fact that it had left from the Temple Day. He tried to puzzle it through in his mind.

She shook her head, as though to dissuade him from working things out. Better to accept them as they were; so she smiled.

‘The Glory never really left,’ she said.

‘No?’ he said, and there was a question in his voice.

‘No,’ she said. ‘That night when the Glory was around you and you preached like you never had before, and we were all brought to tears, that was when the Glory came to stay amongst us.’

He did not quite understand, but he did not want to break the thread of her story.

‘That night,’ she continued, ‘the Glory passed into Trudi. I saw it actually go from you into her. She shone with it.’

He remembered Trudi at the door, her eyes shining, and her face glowing. He remembered her shock that people could talk about ordinary things. Her spirit had been with the Ineffable, and her heart had been gripped by His love, and others were just chattering away! So now he knew!

Sadie took his hand, and then both hands; then she gave him an unaccustomed hug, and she had tears in her eyes. When she spoke her voice was choked, but she persisted. ‘It isn’t that the Glory passed only into Trudi. It came in this new way to more of us also; you and your lovely wife, in fact those of us who wanted it. It just didn’t have to be with you: it was for all of us. Trudi is maybe a special lightbearer because she wants to be. But others of us are that too, though in a quieter way, so that people won’t be scared of the Glory, but come to know and love it. Maybe the Glory will never again be around your shoulders and over your head, and maybe it will, or in ways that you’ll never know.’

That all made sense to him, sense and life. He kept pondering the words as he walked towards the rectory. He saw the tall craggy buildings of the terraced streets, and they all looked stark against

'The Glory on the Inside'

the flaring blue lights of the mercury lamps, but inside he was knowing the Glory. He was also gently savouring the miracle of a transformed widow, and a changed people around him. Maybe the change was partial and with some only transitory—for that was what often happened—but he knew that Trudi was set in glory forever, and so was he and his wife, the children, and others like those of whom Sadie had spoken. It was a new thought to him that glory could be external and yet unseen, and then that it could be internal but greatly felt. He kept thinking of his wife, and then of Sadie, and Trudi and some of the others, and suddenly there was a beauty in the cragged houses and looming buildings and the beloved starkness of it all.

2

*The Descent of
Stephen Stylites*

The reader will be intrigued to know whether there is such a person as the Stephen of this book. The answer is, 'Yes!'

He will also want to know whether all that is said to happen to him was true, and again the answer is, 'Yes!'

When he wants to know the purpose of the story, then the answer is, 'This can happen to you. It may have happened to you.' In any case the reader needs to see that happenings beyond human imagining keep on occurring in this universe. They are not the brainstormings of imaginative writers.

In this same story we ought not to be deceived by the simplicity of it, for it is intended to whet the appetite for richer happenings in us than we dreamed could be the case.

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

I want to tell you this story about a friend of mine. When I say ‘a friend of mine’ I have to tell you also that he is my closest friend, as I am his. In fact I have known him from childhood, even babyhood. I cannot remember a time when I was not conscious of him, as he of me. So our relationship has been very close, the closest possible for two human beings. We have talked to each other as a man speaks to himself in addressing his own soul. For that reason I am in a position to share with you his most intimate thoughts, and I know that in no way would he object to my doing so.

I am not going to start right at the beginning, for the whole story is a long one, and its revelations—at least the ones I wish to relate—are really significant for the matters of our humanity. I am in fact going to start where I sense him to be today, and work back from this point.

Where, then, is he today?

The answer is that my friend Stephen acknowledges that for some years he has been Stephen Stylites, a person who has been a pole-sitter.

You have probably heard of modern pole-sitters, and such men are either seeking for fame—inclusion in the *Guinness’ Book of Records*—or they are protesting against the present ways of the human race. Not a few of them are clearly rebels. One or two are pole-sitters out of a sense of humour, and they need no explanation.

The Glory on the Inside

However, you may know little or nothing of the history of pole-sitters, and so may be wondering about the significance of the name ‘Stylites’. Let me explain. The whole thing began—so it seems—with the advent of a man named Simon Stylites, who sat right on the top of a pole. Of course, it had a platform on it, built to accommodate one person. In Simon’s case the first pole he sat on was fairly short, indeed close to the ground, but from time to time he graduated to higher poles. Commencing with the height of a few ells (about three feet is the length of an ell), he finally reached an altitude of thirty-six to forty ells. He was then, very high up in the world, and a long way from human affairs. Simon set a fashion for many ascetics who followed him. They lived disciplined lives of prayer and contemplation atop of their poles. Most constructed a railing around the platform to prevent falling, and some built cells to shelter them somewhat from the elements.

Let us return now to my friend Stephen, and I hasten to say that he did not have a literal cell on the top of a literal pole. He is far too active a man to live with that kind of restriction. In fact I often think of him as mercurial, and certainly he wishes to involve himself in the affairs of human beings because he is deeply intrigued by humanity. He places it next to God in his interest ratings. No, he has not been literally up a pole, but in other ways he certainly has lived like that. This I will explain later.

Let me then take you back to where he lived without the aid of a pole. As I do so, you will see the qualities which were engendered in him then, and which still endure. Being a son who related strongly to his mother and father, a father himself who related deeply to his children, and the husband of a wife whom he dearly loved (and who, in herself has always been of unusually strong character), he has been a man who has had rich involvement with people, and who likes to be able to serve them. When he was a boy of five—so he tells me—he had an overwhelming personal experience of God, and from that time forward always knew he was to be a servant, both of God and of man. Far from fulfilling this role wholly and ideally, he has had the struggle most of us have, between egotism on the one hand and altruism on the other.

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

He has always had a strong desire to fulfill the gifts and talents which are his, and a longing to hand something on to posterity. In the latter feeling he has not been averse to seeking fame, although he has contempt for the kind of ambition which seeks only its own. He would count fame true only when he has served others, and done that selflessly. If you asked him whether or not he had accomplished this, he would give you a rueful smile and say, 'Not yet!' I fancy he has never really seen himself as a selfless person. At the same time he has sought strongly to serve God and his fellow creatures, and he is fascinated by the world around him, God near him, and the ceaseless stream of humanity which flows about him. Also, like me, he is a compulsive writer. He knows no greater joy than to use words, becoming their friend, employing them skilfully and to good purpose. At least that is his desire. I suspect that like me he often fails in his endeavours. Nevertheless he persists.

Many years ago Stephen felt the call to read theology, and did so rather successfully. Theology itself had a fascination for him, which is understandable since theology is the study of God. He discovered that in studying God you must also study man, and with man, the creation that is his surround. You might say that he was a stripling to begin with in these three elements, that is the matters of theology, anthropology and cosmology; yet as he learned their facts and phenomenologies, life increasingly had meaning for him. He always marvelled at the varieties of thought within human minds, and was entranced by each new line of thought. To give him his due he was not a dilettante, that is, one who interested himself in these various things without seriousness. Study with him was no pastime. He reasoned that if he knew more of God, man and nature, he would know more of life, be more useful to himself and others, and live life more richly. I think that has happened with him.

Even so, I happen to know that it has also brought him great pain. For example, he believes he has discovered the true way of

The Glory on the Inside

life by coming to that truth of God which has liberated him from false and deceitful ways of thinking. At the same time he also senses the falsity of human beings, especially when they speak about God. He has only contempt for agnostics, calling them lazy and uninvolved thinkers. He has a certain respect for atheists (he calls an agnostic a lazy atheist) because he always sees in them the anger they have for the God who is not as they think He ought to be. He is sure that atheists know of the existence of God, but not His actual nature.

A further problem to him is the dull nature of much religion, especially that which goes by the name 'Christian'. He sees religion as a (so-called) questing after God, an endeavour to discover who He is, and to come to terms with Him. In all this he finds no true humility, but only human illusion. Religion, he thinks, is generally man's cunning way of trying to pacify the Deity he does not intend to serve.

More than this, Stephen is a man who is pained by the innate depravity and degradation of human beings. He is most pained when he discovers it in himself. Of later years he has learned to come to terms with what a human being is—on this dark side—for he searches every time for the glory side of humanity, the vestigial elements of God's image which originally constituted man. He simply accepts humanity as it is without agreeing with what it is and does. Even so, he is still stirred most deeply by human hypocrisy, especially in the realm of human spirituality. He is no less dismayed when he finds it in himself than when he finds it in others. By hypocrisy I do not mean the doing of something vile under pretence of doing good, but simply the bland way in which people state the great truths of God and are not deeply moved by them. It would be summed up by the statement of a great man: '... having the *form* of godliness, but denying its power'.

Well, that is enough about some of the attitudes I have discovered in my friend Stephen. I must hasten to describe to you the events which led to his ascent of the pole—an ascent, by the way, which he did not realise he had made until many years afterwards. It all happened this way . . .

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

Stephen and his wife—to say nothing of their young family—obeyed a call and command to go to another country. To begin with they had some trepidation about the matter. They wondered whether they would be sufficient to accomplish such a mission, for a mission it was. The group that was sending them was well aware that Stephen was somewhat unorthodox, so they fully tested what he said was his ‘call’. They subjected it to such trial that Stephen and his wife Elaine wondered whether they ought to go at all if it meant being sent by such a body as this, and relying on them for support. Finally they saw the sense of their call being verified rather than being received uncritically; so they were rather glad of the testing. After all, they were going into an area that was sometimes visited by war. There was also plenty of disease and sickness, and communication would have to be made in another language. Eventually both senders and sent were satisfied that God was in the matter, and so it proceeded.

I will not venture to describe all the years they spent in that foreign land, claiming it and its people as their own, seeking to be servants and so to fulfill their mission. Those who sent them were not uninvolved, either. In fact they had more than modest expectations of Stephen and his family, and in a way they were not disappointed. The letters and reports they received helped them to see that the call was indeed valid, and had a certain promise of genuine success. Stephen not only served but he also studied. That is, he became reasonably proficient in the language, and shared that rapport with the people which one on mission needs to have, though not all obtain it. Sometimes he gave more time to his work than he ought to have so that his family were deprived of some fatherhood and husbandhood, but even so they managed. As for his endless theological quest, he never abandoned it. His love for this study grew with his ever-increasing involvement in it.

I must say at this point that Stephen was oriented to the practice of life rather than to its theory. What theological material he obtained he would immediately try to put to use. This was particularly in the realm of human needs and human relationship.

The Glory on the Inside

He had, for example, been a minister of a congregation in a Christian denomination which had preserved the dignity of worship down through many centuries. Worship then was admirable, but often people were locked into liturgical exercises and failed to see the dynamic truths which had formed the liturgy, and in which that worship was embedded. He had discovered that such worshippers often knew little of the truth of God Himself, and so he hastened to unfold the mysteries of the Christian Gospel—the Gospel of God, of His Christ, and of His Kingdom. These mysteries are not religious mumbo jumbo or spiritual hocus-pocus, but the central truths of human living, and most powerful when discovered for what they are. Gradually his church left behind its liturgical bondage and realised the rich truth which had given birth to its worship. As a result a congregation which had been impotent for some fifty years sprang into life. It began to bring a witness of life to its own community and some of its members moved out into other places to share the rich secrets which had transformed their own beings.

Here then, in another land, Stephen and Elaine began to share these revelations with a people whose lifestyle was greatly different from the one the couple had known back in their own land. In other words, Stephen knew that no matter what the race, or colour of skin, or culture, man at heart is universally the same and has the same basic needs. Most of these needs have to do with the human conscience. When a conscience is tortured or heavy, then the spirit of a man cannot be joyful. Better than food, clothing, and comfort, is a quiet conscience. The man who has that has joy and peace, and is then free to love because he has been liberated in life.

It is true that in the new land in which he worked there was a great deal of poverty and illiteracy, but he was amazed at the satisfaction simple living brought with it. A humble dwelling, few possessions, an acceptance of the rigours of weather, and the continuous adversities of life, seemed to build character and a working philosophy of living. Visitors from affluent countries were often deeply distressed by the harsh conditions under which the people lived, but he noted their distress was more often caused by their

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

own guilt of affluence, and by their comparison of two cultures—their own and the one to which they had come.

I suppose what I am trying to convey is that Stephen saw man's deepest need as a spiritual one. I use the word 'spiritual' not in some abstract sense, or as opposed to 'material', but as a word which describes man in his essence. Man does not so much have a spirit as he *is* a spirit. Mind and body are not opposed to spirit but part of it. Man is a unitary whole—body, mind and spirit—but his unitary nature is dependent upon God for its wholeness and integrity; otherwise he is a wayfarer, not knowing where he is going, not knowing how to truly be.

It was not that this young missionary did not care for the things of the mind and the body: he did. Yet he also saw that the way we go about food, drink, clothing and comfort is determined by the mindset we have as spiritual beings. So he set aside the temptation to attract people by directly ministering to their bodies and minds, and set about seeking to lead them to the truth as he knew it. I need not—at this point—spend time on the modes of doing this. In any culture human beings pick up the nature of a man, his truthfulness or his ambition, and they know whether he is a faltering human being, or a person of integrity. This was what Stephen, his wife Elaine and their team friends sought to be, and so persons in need began to be drawn towards that point where their needs could be met, especially those needs which are met in true horizontal and vertical relationships.

In a series of meetings which some would call 'evangelistic' Stephen opened up the truths of 'light' and 'darkness'. He used the ancient biblical symbols and these seemed to speak to the audiences that came, for they too thought in symbols. By means of these he reached their hearts, the hearts of people of another culture. A transformation appeared in them, even overnight. A certain amount of amazement was born, an astonishment which opened up new dimensions for the hearers and receivers, and so life was born in that small community of hitherto nominal (Christian) believers. Their nominal belief became dynamic faith and it was inevitable that soon the wider community of people would be

The Glory on the Inside

affected. This was the case, and in their exuberance the inner group began to use the powers of prayer to change first the small community and then to affect the larger (non-believing) society around them.

As the years passed the young man began to understand other mysteries which he had but dimly comprehended in his formal years of study. Words such as *grace*, *love*, *justification* and *reconciliation* ceased to be merely theological terms and sprang into life for him. Also his understanding of the Triune God began to be most functional in his life. He was seeing something of the Fatherhood of the Creator–Redeemer, something of the cosmic Lordship of the Son, and the powerful working of the Spirit in his own everyday living. He would, for example, be warmed by the knowledge that God was his Father, and that He had sent His Son to bring liberation to fallen human creatures. The older ideas of a very severe and remote God were transformed into warm understandings of Him as Father. This did not lower the transcendence of God as the Father, but brought a sense of His love in providing for the erasure of guilt through the sufferings of the Cross.

Stephen had read widely, especially the works of wise men of the Spirit, and he knew that the action of the Cross was of immense cost to God as Father, as also to the Son as the obedient Redeemer. No less was the Spirit involved in the dimensionless suffering of the Cross. So then this Spirit was ‘searching the deeps of God’ and communicating them to mortal human beings—much to their joy and transformation. Stephen received the communication of that Spirit so that sometimes when he stood up to speak—and he had to speak in a language which was not his own native tongue—he would feel a rush of power into his body. It was not the concoction of a fevered brain, or the psychological induction of his own resources into one dynamic effort. No, it was the coming of a supernatural power upon him, supplying him with the resources of mind and heart and spirit which he lacked of himself. Suddenly the power was there, and he was alive with the fire of the word of God.

As I have said, this did not take place in one action, or within the space of a short time. Truths which he had known in form—if

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

not in substance—became substantial to him. He was enthused beyond his personal native reticence. Thus, when he returned with his family to his own land he was met with puzzlement by many who heard him. Some seemed to accept him and his words instinctively. He was to them a sudden source of rich evocation: he stimulated their thinking and their experience of life. It seemed to be a matter of ‘deep calling unto deep’; so they listened and benefited from the experience.

This, however, was not the case of all who heard him. Years before many had been suspicious of his modes of ministry and of many of the things which he had taught. Some, after testing him by the word of God as they knew it, had been satisfied that he was no heretic, but a renewer of the truth as it had always been. It was just that renewal seemed so different from the stereotypes of belief and worship that they had appeared to be an invasion of that which was established and therefore good. Gradually he came to see that a certain person, though not differing greatly from him in his understanding of theology, opposed him. Stephen dismissed him from his mind. Only years later—when he was on his Stylites’ pole—did the memory of this person return, bringing with it dynamic consequences.

It was true that some of his friends were drawn closer to him, and he to them. They were fired by the things he said, and they greatly encouraged him. On the other hand, he was disappointed that many of his previously close friends now shunned him. They did this in a gentle and quiet way, but that was worse than if they had confronted him. He would not have been human had he not wondered whether those who now chose to become his enemies were not in some way right about him, and that he had read wrongly, or understood perversely the things which were so basic in his thinking. Even so, he ascended no pole of separation to work out the sorrow of alienation. He accepted it as part of the process through which he must go in the pursuit of truth, and in the proclamation of it.

One thing cheered him. He heard simply by accident that a person whom he held in high regard had said, ‘Oh Stephen! Don’t

The Glory on the Inside

worry about him. He will never be a heretic; his theology is too good for that. It is just that he is always on the frontier of things. He is always looking to see what God is doing, and to hear what He is saying. That's why he'll always be misunderstood.' That remark—overheard by chance—often comforted him in times when he was fiercely opposed.

You will have seen by now that Stephen and I have a very close friendship. How often I have had to comfort him, reassure him, and be used as a sounding-board for his innermost thoughts. He has a love for one of David's sayings: 'Teach me wisdom in my secret heart'. He is the only man I have known who has wholly bared his 'secret heart' to me. There can be quite some pain in this kind of sharing, but then—though you may not easily believe it—Stephen was only interested in his own subjectivity so that he could realise and achieve more objectivity in life. He insisted that self-examination was not a matter of morbid introspection, but a healthy lead to further usefulness in the affairs of God and man. He himself loved the objectivity of theology, whilst he also sought to lead men into subjectively apprehending it.

It was on Stephen's second return to his land that I had most to do with him. He came home on a high-crested wave. His face shone, his eyes sparkled, his whole being was vibrant. I wondered what was the latest he had seen out on the frontiers! When I tackled him he laughed, and I noted that his laughter was free. Not that I could remember it ever being bound, but his freedom seemed to have new dimensions. He explained the matter in terms of his relationship with God becoming deeper and more real.

'I have always known God', he said, 'and yet have never been satisfied with what I have known. It has been like a goad to urge me on to greater knowledge. As you know so well, I have never mistaken my theological knowledge for an understanding of God, although I have been grateful for the help it gives. Knowing God is a personal thing, and as the apostle John has said, it is eternal life itself, for life is a matter of relationships. To relate wholly to God is

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

to relate wholly to man—insofar as man allows—and these full relationships constitute life itself. Over the years I have determined to know God rather than just know *about* Him. Knowing Him and knowing about Him are complementary, but knowing Him is primary. In one sense I have always known Him; in another I have known Him so little.

‘So at one stage I set about knowing so that faith and sight would seem as one. Of course you cannot achieve this wholly, especially in this world where we walk by faith and not by sight, but there is a “sight” of faith that is almost sight in itself.’

We talked this matter over for days, especially meditating together at nights. I came to see what he meant. My understanding grew as he explained what had happened in that other country. I think it best for me to relate it to you in Stephen’s own words.

‘For some years some of my students had travelled the country preaching the good news of God. They were quite aware of what this news was and is. They knew it to be the story of grace and love which touches human hearts, or—conversely—makes them very angry. Despite the sometimes angry reactions, they persisted, and from time to time would send me reports of their work. They and I—along with my lecturing colleagues—had an anticipation of what has been called “revival”, that is, the freshening of the church so that it knows anew the life and power of God and so witnesses beyond the mere form of beliefs, and the arguments of apologists. It penetrates to the very truth itself and so produces dynamic effects and results.

‘One day I said to the men on their return from itinerant ministry, “What you tell me is good, but not good enough. You are helping people to come to the Kingdom and to the forgiveness of sins, and whilst this is of great importance there is something even more essential. It is the lighting of a flame that will sweep across the land, renewing dull believers into dynamic ones, and confronting the community with the power of God.”

‘They agreed with me. One of them ventured timidly, “If the children cannot light such a fire, perhaps it is because the father cannot”. I looked to see whether he was being ironical, but this was

The Glory on the Inside

far from the case. He was puzzled, and so were his friends on the teaching team.

‘His words had struck home to me and I realised that what he had said was true. I went away to pray and think and then to talk with other friends on our team of missionaries. The outcome was quite powerful. One morning I had a vision of Jesus on the Cross after he had died. The Roman soldiers and others were taking him down, and the women were following him to the tomb. They laid him there, and they and the women departed, but somehow I was able to look into the tomb, and I saw him lying there, not in a fearful state of death but in a state of serenity. He was wound around with gravecloths, and a light gauzy veil was over his face. Through this I was able to see his eyes which were so serene.

‘Then suddenly and quietly he stood up, emerging through the cloths to stand upright. He looked serene, noble, regal and lordly. Indeed his eyes gazed out over all time, history and creation. Suddenly I knew he was Lord, and the triumph of it all gripped my heart. I had now seen him as I had longed to see—in a vision given to faith—and I wanted nothing less as also I could have nothing more. For a moment there was a faint misgiving, namely that this Lord of All would disappear and be lost, even to memory. But I was wrong. The whole vision passed into me, and has been with me ever since. I could now say, “Jesus is Lord!” and know it not only as a theological fact, but as the very truth itself.’

Stephen then shared with me what took place from that point onwards.

‘It was revival, simply and wholly. It was the flame for which we had prayed, the fire which we had sought. It was Immanuel—God amongst us. I saw my team-mates come into richer, more powerful life. We had dreams and visions such as they knew in the early church, and the Spirit who inspired them then gave them to us in these new fresh days. It was not the echo of a voice once given to patriarchs and prophets but a voice speaking to us immediately so that we knew Him by the faith of sight.

‘It transformed us, Elaine my wife and our children who were with us at the time. The other children by now were in our home

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

country, yet even they must have felt the dynamism of what was happening as it was conveyed to them through our letters. The students wondered what had happened to us, since they saw us daily in tears yet with a new joy, peace and expectancy. They also heard a new note in our teaching. Some of them began to have dreams and visions too, and letters came to us from the team which was on its teaching tour.

‘One day a member of the team returned to our city. He had to make arrangements for his future with a missionary from another area, but it was the excitement in his eyes which caught my attention.

“‘What has happened?’ I enquired.

‘His eyes glowed. “Pentecost!” he said.

“‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Then he told me, “The Spirit has come,” he said, “and even more than at those meetings a year ago”.

‘I remembered back to the night when we had prayed and the whole courtyard in which we were worshipping had been shaken. We had not at first thought of it as a visitation of God until the congregation rose to its feet and cried out, “The Lord is here! The Lord is here! He has filled us with His Holy Spirit.” He had indeed done that, and it was a wonderful happening.

“‘What do you mean?’ I asked again. “How better than those other meetings?”

“‘We have been filled with His Spirit,” he replied excitedly. “There is great worship, great joy and powerful life. The gifts given at Pentecost are with us. We see healings and miracles, and those of us who were timid are now bold. We preach the word without fear and many of the hard old men and women are weeping and coming to Christ.”’

Stephen and I discussed these things for many hours. We would go over them with a fine theological toothcomb to see whether they were of man or of God, whether of human emotion or of divine origin. We could come to only one conclusion: they were of God. Even the excesses which sometimes appeared could be explained by the suddenness of the revelations those people had

The Glory on the Inside

received. It was no wonder they could not handle them all in a mature way. Even so, Stephen's well taught students were able to consolidate the good things which were happening, and when Stephen visited the area some weeks later he was proud of what they had done. He himself remained for only a couple of days because his return home with his family was impending, but the two days were enough to imprint scenes of power and wonder on his memory for ever.

He saw the softness of people's hearts as the word of God was preached. They drank in his words as though they were spirit and life and so life-giving to their own spirits. Whilst he preached some of the listeners saw light about him, and light flashing through him in brilliant shafts. Others cried out as they saw Christ stand with the word of God in hand, or as he revealed himself in his dying love or resurrection power. In one meeting folk shared the visions that had happened and there were many of these and all different. People believed that by the laying on of the hands of the pastors they would be healed, and so healings took place. The Scriptures came alive under the preaching of renewed men, and some of the miracles are better not told for they were so unusual and yet through them new revelations of God's power and love were brought to the wondering listeners and viewers.

Some days earlier, Stephen had stood with his own people in the city where he served, and when about to close a meeting with prayer had begun to sing a rich and haunting song in the local language, which he had learned. He had recognised that the way he sang the song was not at all of his Western origins, and when he had finished singing there were few dry eyes among those present. They had been amazed, for the singing was that of their fathers, centuries before. It was what would be called 'folk singing'.

Now, in this place which he was visiting, where revival had taken place, the same song arose from within him, even though he did not know what the next words would be. This time a further miracle was taking place. *Everyone of the audience of about three hundred people was singing the song with him!* They had not heard

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

it before, for he had come hundreds of miles from the city where he had first sung it.

Stephen said to me, ‘You will not believe me if I tell you that that night I heard angelic singing. It was not the music of their land, nor of our own land; nor has such music ever been heard by human beings, except on such occasions as these. It was as though heaven was rejoicing!

‘And why not? We were all so filled with love. Old family feuds had dissolved. Old sins had been forgiven, families and villages united. Love flowed in a way we had not previously known it. It was not just an emotional religious happening. It was the event of faith which had given birth to love and obedience and a new healthy holiness of life. A new generosity had been born. Folk—most of whom were very poor—shared their goods and substance. One rich landowner made a great feast and invited the lowly people whom he had previously scorned, and it was like a wedding banquet. Indeed Christ and his Bride were greatly rejoicing.’

I can easily understand what happened to Stephen on his return to his own land, the land in which I too am now living. Whilst we must not talk about casting pearls before swine, we can speak of ‘the weaker brethren’ being unable to take the revelations which come to those of strong faith and a steady conscience. I knew that there had been a time in Stephen’s life when he would have been wary of such revelations, even firmly opposed to them. It had taken him years to come to the power and love which he had witnessed in revival. Had he not stayed at the frontiers he too would have been sceptical of such reports as he was to give to those who had sent him. Had they not been brought up in the tradition which told them that such gifts had been for the initial launching of the church but had passed away as the need for them also ceased? Stephen should have taken this into account and not burst in upon them with such powerful and stunning reportage, for that was when—unknown to Stephen himself—he began his ascent to the top of his Stylites’ pole.

The Glory on the Inside

Mind you, Stephen had not discussed the matter with me at the time of its happening. It is only after all these years that he has been prepared to open up on the matter. Had he done so, then things might have been different, but then God has His times and seasons for us, and some of these may be days of suffering before the days of liberation.

‘I can remember speaking to this listening group when I came back to my original country’, said Stephen. ‘It was a kind of “reporting to the church”, just as Paul and his companions would do when they returned to the sending church of Antioch. So I told them, in an unvarnished account, what had happened. I imagined they would rise and express their joy, perhaps in words, perhaps in praise, and even in spontaneous singing such as I had heard in those wonderful days. I knew that they too had been praying for revival and would be glad of the news of its happenings. I was not so naive as to think they would all welcome the strange and wonderful new events, but for the most part—even if they could not understand everything—would be glad that God had worked.

‘To be honest I do not know to this day what was in their hearts. I realised as the report proceeded that some eyes were puzzled, others suspicious, and some coldly indifferent. Some looked shocked, some held disbelief, and some were angry. The atmosphere was cold. Finally I knew the despair of someone who has glad news which is not seen that way, but rather as the ravings of an unsettled mind. I suppose I finally stopped before I had told all. It was pointless in continuing.

‘After the report there were a few other items of business and somehow my report was lost in it all. Folks chatted a trifle and gradually the group melted away. No one talked to me about what I had said. Things had returned to normal. The revival was as though it had never been.

‘In the days that followed, the message was conveyed to me that I had better not dwell too much on the events in which I had been involved. It would be more helpful if I would use the gifts of teaching and preaching as I had used them in past days. This was

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

what audiences expected of me. Otherwise, my friends would feel that I had let them down.

‘One night we were invited to dinner by one of the leaders, and the meal was indeed very tasty. That man of wisdom talked to me in a gentle way. He admitted that there could have been a lot which was significant in the revival itself, but pointed out that our culture was so different, and our lifestyle of another kind. What he conveyed to me was that I must not subject people *here* to the events that had happened *there*. We left that home with a cold feeling in our hearts.’

It was then that I asked Stephen why he had kept these things buried over the years. Why had he not shared them with me? His answer was, ‘I scarcely dared speak of them to myself. I was in a horrible state of darkness. Had I been wrong? Were all the happenings explainable on psychical and social grounds? Were they the sudden upthrusting of generations of emotional need, and other elements which are beyond our Western understanding? These, and many similar thoughts would go through my mind, torturing me. Why should I think these matters right when my closest friends looked upon them as unreal and unscriptural? Why would these friends withdraw from me, when once we had such friendship and such theological and spiritual affinity?’

‘Now I was in a lonely situation, and at times my thinking was bewildered. I must be wrong. If only I would return to my former humility things would change. Friends would forgive the temporary aberrations. Life would resume its normal patterns again.’

‘One thing kept me from returning to what they chose to call sanity. It was the brilliant memory of a change in my life, my wife’s life and the lives of the children who had been with us. I could remember the tremendous joy of those who had been released from their former manner of living. Some who had had little peace because of demon possession, others who had been healed, and many who had discovered a lasting joy—all of these gave the “No!” to those who would not accept my report and my message. In addition there was the response of what might be

The Glory on the Inside

called “the common people”, sometimes known as “the laity”. Wherever I preached they were there. Churches were filled; the lives of many changed. I had letters, ’phone calls, and visits from those who had caught a new dimension not hitherto seen or felt by them. These things encouraged me.’

Even so, Stephen reacted without knowing it. A fine ministry was offered to him in a certain teaching institution and he was reluctant to accept it. It would take him and the family away to another part of his country and so separate him from old and new friends. He warned the institution of the new negative stance that had been taken against him by many, for this might militate against those who would engage him for teaching. To make sure that his prospective employers understood, he sent them a copy of the report he had sent back to his friends earlier, before he had returned from the revival area. His own promotional secretary had refused to send it out. She knew the effect it would have.

‘This letter will close every door you ever had opened to you’, she said.

Well, the new group could read it and if they did not like it he would not come.

They liked it. ‘Sounds just like the days of the early church, as though it were pages from the book of the Acts’, they told him, and he and his family prepared to leave for their new ministry. Within the family he had had some problems with their older children, but they were days of unrest among young people, and days when every form of authority and leadership was being questioned. They were the days of protests, sit-downs, rock festivals, rejection of the orthodox patterns of churches, and the formation of anti-cultures and alternate lifestyles. They were dynamic days in many ways and he could not escape them.

When it was time to go, it was mainly in silence that he was farewelled, he and his wife and children. The lasting impression was of the blandness of old friends, the things they did not say, the apparent relief on faces at the departure.

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

There were reasons for this kind of reaction, of course. New movements were beginning to appear in many churches. Different views of marriage, divorce, social living and morality had emerged from ‘the new theology’ and the ‘new morality’. The world had become a ‘swinging’ society and this had greatly affected the church. Television had caused evening church services to dwindle in numbers and dedication. The sincerity of leaders was being put to rigorous tests. Life was changing everywhere. The old guard was bewildered for the most part. For them, Stephen had represented just another movement which was confronting the traditional faith and its practice. In fact this was not the case; but it seemed to be.

In the new situation Stephen and his family were busy settling in and adapting to a changed way of life. Many years of living in another culture meant adjustments for the children. Stephen seemed reasonably able to cope, but at the back of his mind was the memory of the shocks he had received on his return from ministry overseas. He waited daily for letters from old friends, especially those who had not farewelled him. Never a letter came. The weeks passed into months and then into years and he realised he was cut off forever. The new society into which he had moved accepted him warmly, and seemed to appreciate his ministry, his work, his family situation and his lifestyle. He lived in the delight of having new students and following their lives with keenness, especially as they shared with him their problems and needs. He found he could be more articulate in the institution than he had been back on his original home ground, and this puzzled him.

‘After all these years’, Stephen told me recently, ‘I realise that it was in those first few months that I began my ascent of the pole. I never even knew that was where I was climbing. Indeed I did not even realise that I was climbing at all.

‘Although I was unaware of what was happening, I had a measure of uneasiness. I kept asking myself why I was uneasy. The sheer clarity of life seemed somewhat clouded. I even began to

The Glory on the Inside

doubt the richness of the years abroad. I remember taking my uneasiness to the heavenly Father and asking Him why it was. He answered, “You have racial prejudice”. When I protested that I loved a coloured skin, He agreed. “You love a coloured skin more than a white one,” He said, and I knew that to be true. I knew I had some anger against my fellow countrymen but did not trace it to my reaction to their negative response to me. I deliberately gave up my disaffection and felt much more free. It was then I began to be quite busy with teaching, personal counselling, the structuring of courses, and opportunities to take the good news into places far distant from our home city.

‘I lost myself in this kind of work. We saw the fruits of these labours and delighted in the help people had received. Sometimes traces of uneasiness returned, but I learned to cope with these. I thought more, studied more, related more with people, organised more ministry, and learned to live more as a family man. The hurt and the wounding I had received was driven more deeply down, covered over with the busyness of life and the passage of the years. I had even thought in terms of forgiving those who seemed to have rejected me. After all, the great words of *love, grace, forgiveness, and justification* had a special place in my vocabulary. I did not realise that you can be climbing a pole to escape on the one hand, and be busy apart from the pole on the other.’

I know the years which Stephen gave to others, to his wife and to his family. Almost too late he realised the needs of his children and his wife and sought to rehabilitate relationships which had receded. He learned to share more with his wife and children in the adjustments that had to be made as they passed from childhood into teenage, and then into adulthood. He had to wrestle with the problems that students experienced in the new and volatile age in which they lived. Also he had to explore new realms of theology and life. At times his memories of revival seemed simplistic, unrelated to the complexities of modern life. Even so, he had an unerring instinct for the truth, and he insisted on staying out on the

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

frontiers where truth, theology, relationships and life were constantly contested. He looked eagerly for new movements of God and His Spirit, and sometimes found them.

One day, through one of his students, he realised how far he had drifted from the freedom of life that he had known in that other country. This student had been diagnosed as having a malignant cancer. A melanoma on her face had been excised, and the surgeon believed he had cut back beyond the disease. For some eighteen months the young woman had seemed free from it, and then one day she noticed the appearance of a secondary melanoma which was soon followed by others. The surgeon examined her and the situation was pronounced as desperate, and non-operative. This young woman had related to Stephen in his ministry, especially when he had travelled to an area where she had lived. Very soon a relationship of student and teacher had developed into that of a disciple and master. She penetrated in him to that area of faith and trust that he had known so many years before. Elements of life began to revive within him. It was as though spirit began to flow through him in a manner he had not known in recent years, for all his useful busyness.

Stephen explained the matter to me. 'It is not easy to describe what happened with that young woman. Years before she had broken off an engagement when she felt it was not God's will to be married to the young man. In some wonderful way she had come into a relationship of love with her heavenly Father, and in some aspects I had been an agent in this. What is more, she seemed to know me better than I knew myself. She kept drawing out of me those things which had been in my very life's blood. The old power returned, but with it there was a greater maturity, a deeper sense of the richness of life and the truth of God. Then, when death approached and she lived in our home under Elaine's care for some weeks, I saw anew the dimension which I had lost. I can only describe it as a hanging loose to everything of this world, and indeed everything of the world to come. She neither wished to be gone from this world nor to arrive prematurely in the next. She had the most beautiful equipoise of will that I have ever seen. She was

The Glory on the Inside

alive to God and dead to all else. She had a serenity and freedom that I have rarely seen in human beings. Yet there had been a time when I had known much of that myself and that had been in those strange days preceding revival. I too had hung loose to all things, especially the attitudes of those who were friends or enemies.

‘One night she had a beautiful vision of heaven and saw the Father in His love. It greatly affected her, but even so she did not wish to have her earthly life quickly terminated. The students who visited her—and generally at her request—had an impression indelibly printed upon them that I doubt they could ever erase, even if they had wanted to do so. She gave a pure witness to that wonderful relationship which a child of the Father can have with Him. Her visitors went away most thoughtfully, and in her dying days she had more effect than the most brilliant theologian could have upon his disciples.

‘She had an incredible effect on me. I began to sense again the freedom that had once been mine, and there was a loss of care, of fear of others, of the desire to prove myself in any way. When we shared in her funeral service it was more like a celebration of life than death. Someone unthinkingly referred to it as her wedding. I have rarely seen more joy in any service than in that time of praise. I myself had a vision of her gambolling in the freedom of green pastures, white-froked and fully free as she came home to the Father. Her own father said, “She had her bags packed, ready to go”. Her parents are wonderful people of God, and were humble enough to learn from her in her last years.’

I know it was shortly after that strange event that Stephen and his wife felt they should launch out into yet another ministry of truth, and they were freed to do so. With this renewed sense of liberty, Stephen recommenced the writing he had relinquished many years before. He also used other means of communicating the word which was again like a fire in his bones. By now the children for the most part were working or married, and seldom was any one of them at home. Although few from his original home city ever

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

communicated with him, Stephen had a group of friends who had been loyal to him over the years of teaching.

Then one night a revelation came to him which left him stunned.

He had awakened after midnight, and lay, unable to sleep. The old uneasiness had returned. He tried to reason the puzzling reversion to this state of mind, and in the midst of his thinking, the faces of many who had been his friends but who had rejected him rose up before him. With them were others who had made it clear that they regarded him as being a heretic and not a man of faith. Whilst he had rejected the accusations, he had always had to fight the hurtful things which had been said to him and spoken about him. He felt a warm anger rising up within him. With a sickening sense in his heart, he recognised that he was in a state of hatred, but hatred which he tried to tell himself was justified. He was feeling the bitterness of injustice. Had he—in those earlier days—taught untruth, or had lived immorally, he could have understood their opposition. He remembered the warnings he had been given—not to speak out. All the unwanted memories that he had once thought were gone, flooded him afresh. Almost in a panic he prayed, but his prayer was a protest.

‘Lord’, he said, ‘You know I have forgiven them all. How does it happen then that they are here again, as though I had never forgiven them?’

It seemed that the answer to him was, ‘Quite so. You never did forgive them.’

He protested. ‘Lord, you know I have forgiven them—many times.’

‘Ah yes, many times’, was the reply, ‘but once—had it been total—would have been enough. I have forgiven you, once for all, so you should have forgiven, once for all.’

This seemed so hard to Stephen. ‘If I forgave’, he asked, ‘then why should I have to do it again?’

The answer was surprising, but its truth was clear. ‘You forgave as a legalist forgives. The Gospel demands you forgive, so you

The Glory on the Inside

forgave. It was easier for your conscience when you did so, but you see, you cannot forgive apart from love. I, your God, love and so forgive. You forgave, but never loved. Now you must love. Then you will truly forgive and it will be “once for all”.

As he lay there the truth opened widely to him. He had never thought in those days that he hated them; only that he had been hurt. Now he knew that he had hugged his hurts in order to justify his unconscious anger. As he lay there the anger ebbed away. The hurt was quietly gone. A love for those who had neglected him came with ease. Freshly he understood Jesus’ own cry at the Cross, ‘Father, forgive them for *they know not what they do*’. He realised that Jesus had understood what had triggered his persecutors to kill him. He had understood their reasons and had not condemned them.

Stephen began to think positively. ‘Why’, he said in wonder, ‘they really believed that what I was saying and sharing was both wrong and dangerous. They had never gone through the process that I had had to go through. I came home bursting with joy and power and I expected them to understand. Perhaps they ought to have caught the ring of truth in it all, but they did not. Well, *if they did not, then they did not!* So now I come to terms with that fact. “My friends and my enemies (so-called) I love and forgive you. My Father above, I ask Your forgiveness for retaining these hurts and angers over the years. They are my sins and I need Your forgiveness. All this time I should have loved. Indeed I was sure I did, but what has been hidden all these years has now been exposed. I am free from these attitudes as my friends and enemies are free from me.”’

I am sure that Stephen did not know at that point that he had been *up a pole!* All he knew was that his freedom brought a richer action of love than ever before. He was puzzled to find how different his writing and speaking became. Others probably sensed the difference; I do not know. Also it was about that time that Stephen began to understand the difference between theology and the truth, between a planned system of witnessing, and true spontaneous witnessing. He has explained much of this in his own writing.

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

‘Truth’, he says, ‘is not merely the facts. Truth is the nature and action of God, and to live in it is to live in that nature and action. No word that man or any other creature utters of himself is the truth. The truth is something you live. You cannot speak it if you do not live it. If you try to, you may spell out the theology of things, and that theology will be a substitute for the truth. Theology is like a street directory. It can define the geographical situation of a certain street and indicate that street by a black line on a white page, but on going to the street itself, we find it is not an impersonal black line but a dynamic situation where people live, commerce is carried out, human interpersonal relationships obtain and everything is vividly apparent. Theology then may indicate truth, but it is not—of itself—the truth. God is the truth as Father, Creator and Redeemer. The Son came to bear witness to the truth of the Father. The Spirit has come to lead us into all truth, so that by this anointing of the Spirit we have come to know the truth.’

Of course, he says much more. What has struck him powerfully is what he has said so many times: ‘You cannot proclaim the truth truthfully (that is, powerfully) unless you live in it’. One may deliver the theology of love, but not its truth if one does not live that truth. One may express the theology of holiness, but it will sound empty and be ineffective unless the pursuit of holiness through love is a personal matter.

We have almost come to the end of our story, which is surely the beginning of a further and more wonderful part of Stephen’s entire narrative. I have left out many details, as is only natural. I have compressed many years into a few pages. The climax of it all lies in his descent from the pole, and I will let him tell you that part in his own words.

‘Well, yes, I would like to tell you about my descending from the pole on which I had unknowingly lived. Of course I never lived on a literal pole, but the pole was no less a reality because of being a symbol. I realise now that in the midst of my business of serving I had kept my distance from people, even the people who have loved

The Glory on the Inside

me most. I had reared a pole in my mind, and had constructed a platform on it. It was—so to speak—my ivory castle. At any second I could be withdrawn into it, and at the same time retain my identity as a spectator. I believed my special world was the universe of theology and my participation a ministry of service. These two things protected me against new hurts and dangerous involvements.

‘Perhaps the most curious thing of all is that I never even imagined I had inner hurts. My own writings taught that hurts are foolish, unnecessary, and to be dealt with once for all. In fact I had rightly pointed out that, “he [Jesus] has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and by his stripes we are healed”. I assumed—and still assume—that, for a genuine believer, all hurts and wounds are redundant. When one is hurt one need not keep or cultivate such hurts, but see them borne in Christ’s immense and personal suffering on the Cross. In this way, any human being can be free. I have held this for some time, and still insist it is wholly the truth. Even so, I had kept my own hurts hidden.

‘Equally with this surprise revelation came another exposure. *I was trying to prove to those who had not accepted God’s strange and wonderful work—the work I had seen overseas—that it was authentic.* The proof, I thought, surely lay in my ministry which God was blessing. The undeniable theology of my writings and teachings only had to be investigated to be seen as authentic and even dynamic. Out on the frontiers we gather rich and useful data.

‘One morning, during a worship service, the image of Simon Stylites flashed into my mind. Here was a man who had opted out of the ruck of life in order to be protected from it. He could look from his high place without being involved in the foolish affairs of men. I had a moment of scorn for the separated ascetic, and that was a moment of scorn for myself. At least Simon’s pole told its story explicitly. Mine was a hidden pole, a cunning platform for instant retreat. Also from that height I could see the failures and defects of others who were in the business of the Gospel. There—in the midst of worship—I revoked pole-sitting! My mind went back to the wonderful days of wholesome freedom when I had not

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

occupied my thinking with the enmities of others, but had known a clear run of love and forgiveness of all. Now—in a flash—the clear run had come again, and I loved its fresh freedom.’

So Stephen came down from his pole. What now follows is really my interpretation of the things which happened to Stephen, and it constitutes quite a commentary on him, yet not so much according to his thinking as mine. Were Stephen to read what I am writing it may well be that he would be greatly surprised. On the other hand he might feel inclined to agree with me. That is how things are with us two.

In order to understand Stephen and his sudden idea of being a Stylite, I pulled out of my shelves a number of books which deal with church history. Sure enough, Simon Stylites was well-recorded. I must admit that I had thought of him only as an ascetic, a man so other-worldly that he was not of this world. How wrong I was. To the world he may not have gone; but in great measure the world came to him. Men have always admired those who live the Spartan life, who endure hardships when others live in softness, comfort and affluence. I think also that they envy the man of meditative mind. Simon remained in that position, seated some ninety feet above the world, for forty years. He held to orthodox doctrine, known in those days as Chalcedonian theology. He greatly impressed two emperors. He worked on behalf of the poor and oppressed and became a renowned worker of miracles, a healer of the sick and converter of the pagans. All in all, a pole-sitter such as Simon was no gimmick-worker, but a useful servant of God.

This new information took my mind back to my friend Stephen. Perhaps there were good things about his pole-sitting, as well as the undesirable aspects of which he was well aware. To come to a clearer understanding about it all, we will need to re-examine some parts of his story and matters relevant to them.

First of all, let us consider the simple fact of Stephen’s pole-sitting. Being who we are, we always act in character. Stephen was a man who had always been sensitive and so he over-reacted to the

The Glory on the Inside

non-acceptance of his friends, as also the opposition of his enemies. For their part they had not agreed with what he had seen happen—that great revival in which he had shared. He should have understood why they had reacted that way. Paul always tried to get into the mind of his audience, and whilst not necessarily agreeing with them, would know why they thought and acted the way they did.

Secondly, my friend Stephen had always taught the grace of God, namely that all our sins and failures were put upon Christ on the Cross and borne by him to extinction. Paul speaks of ‘the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us’, that is, our failure before the law. Stephen should have seen the failures of his opponents nailed on the Cross. When you are angry with people you do not really forgive them. Only when you love them can you truly forgive.

Thirdly, that pole was a temporary escape for Stephen in the midst of his pain. Stephen now gladly admits that he need not have experienced any pain, since Christ had already borne that himself. He could have been free. But burning with injustice he would not be free! Hence he needed a place of seclusion, somewhere to go privately and suffer his hurts. Whilst this form of escape was technically unnecessary, he nevertheless needed it because of his own foolishness.

Fourthly, he can now see—in retrospect—that his passionate love of the truth, and his insistence upon daily grace, was in fact exemplified in his own case. We often think—and teach—that God can only use the person who is wholly obedient, wholly faithful, loving, forgiving, and trusting. If this were the case then God could use very few—if any—of us. Paul, having looked into heaven, could never properly handle what he saw. For the rest of his life he needed ‘a thorn in the flesh’ to keep him humble. God assured the pleading apostle that he could only be strong when he was weak, for in weakness grace is magnified. Stephen had to see this in his own case. That is why he still marvels at the fact that, in the time of his pole-sitting, his proclamation of the word of God was nevertheless a word proclaimed in great power and assurance. Grace was overriding his weakness.

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

In addition to these points I see what I call the main reason for his pole-sitting. It was that he could withdraw—not only *from* pain, but *to* meditation and contemplation, for the development of discernment and understanding. Much of wisdom comes from suffering and not simply from the accumulation of knowledge. Because of his wrong reaction he was forced on to his pole, but being there he developed and matured, even in spite of his failure. The proof of its value lies in the place to which it brought him. Not only was his understanding of the word deepened, not only did he acquire much wisdom, and not only was he kept humbled by restrictive opposition, but he came to see where he had been wrong. Stephen's pole-sitting is a clear illustration that God works all things for good for those who love Him.

Now I come to the point which is my aim in telling Stephen's story, as it is his aim in letting me tell it, namely that he wishes to ask forgiveness of his opponents, confessing his own personal failure. Should you be one of those who did not agree with him, then he opens his arms in love to you, and trusts that your heart will flood with love for him as his does for you. That is the triumph of Calvary love over human division, dislike and disunity.

Although we have not yet finished with Stephen, let us pause for a moment and compare his pole-sitting with our own experience, for probably very few of us escape this exercise. Many of us would imagine we are not at all like our friend, Stephen. We are the people of faith, the triumphalists, the non-failures. We pity Stephen perhaps, but we do not imitate him.

I wonder. There are many equivalents of pole-sitting and very few of us escape this kind of exercise. Some of us, for example, have 'fortress faith'; we hide behind the wall of our dogmatism, the fundamentals of the truth. Outside is the opposing world. Within the fortress we are safe! Others are just rabbits, always scuttling for their underground hide-outs when the going becomes rough and dangerous. Others of us are just 'cut-out' Christians; when confronted by some demanding element of truth we simply cut out at that point. We do not listen to its demands. Fortresses, warrens and

The Glory on the Inside

automatic cut-offs are more dangerous than poles and ivory castles. In assessing Stephen we ought to discern our own case.

The positive message in all of this, however, is that God uses us, no matter what our failures. He is not much interested in triumphalists, theological prodigies and success freaks. He is certainly interested in overcomers because that is what He makes from weak and humble flesh. They ‘get strong in the Lord and in the power of His might’, but they do not imagine that power originates within themselves. God uses us, but His use of us is no seal upon our doctrine, our action or our way of life. These we need to continue to check with Scripture and the voice of the Spirit and the fellowship of the saints.

Consider Stephen in this regard. In all those years—as I have said—he proclaimed the word powerfully and sincerely, and without doubt there was fruitfulness in his life. At the same time he was living in his hurts. Time and again he would transcend this state through grace, but it was always there within him, an unhelpful stratum of his being. This accords with Luther’s famous words about the Christian: ‘Simultaneously sinner and saint’. The Reformer’s words are not to be taken as a cover-up for our failures, but as an encouragement in the midst of them.

I want now to come to what I think is one of the most important facts that Stephen learned concerning himself. It was that, unwittingly, he had tried to counter the criticism of his experience in revival by justifying himself in his ministry. In the writing of books, in the setting out of theology, in the action of ministry he had one eye cocked towards his critics. Surely they would see how authentic was his ministry! He could honestly say that his purpose was not to make them feel guilty, uncomfortable and embarrassed, but just that the movement of God in that far-off land should be seen to be truly of God, and for meeting the deep needs of sinful mankind. He could even say it was not just to put him in the clear. He did not want a ministry harmed or destroyed by the things said about him. He wanted to be free to minister freely.

The shock that came with his discovery was salutary. At the same time it was wonderfully liberating. Having seen the

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

problem he was now free of it. Of course there was repentance and confession, but these were exercised in the light of grace, not in the face of grim and condemnatory law. Grace took on an even more beautiful appearance. The richness of confession was overwhelming. When a man comes to see what is wrong and acknowledges it, all the power of evil is drained from it. It becomes another bridge of grace by which he passes over to even greater knowledge of grace. He who refuses what is disclosed, locks himself into it and his situation becomes even more desperate. This very desperation may force him to confession, for that is the only way he will be free.

All of this underlines the fact that ‘we have this treasure [of God] in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God, and not to us’. It is incredible that we contain the fullness of God and the riches of His glory, but that is true, no matter how earthen we are. The biography of Stephen is, in principle, the biography of any one of us.

Now we can draw our threads together, weaving them to a useful conclusion. What excited Stephen was that he was finished with the past. He could legitimately forget the things of those earlier days—things good and things not good. Unwittingly he had allowed the revival which he had experienced—though it was right in itself—to become an idolatry to him. He had returned to his own land believing that God would visit the church in similar ways, and then—he prayed—his whole nation. Because he could not forget the glory he had seen, he could not forget the modes in which God had worked. In some senses he was seeking to harness the Spirit to the pattern he had seen, not realising the stereotype he was espousing. The Wind must be free to blow where He wills.

So then he was glad to be free of his idolatry, as we all need to be free of such idolatries. Ah, yes, but another gift had come to him: the opportunity to confess, to ask forgiveness, and to love anew. *The truth is that when confession, forgiveness and love are the order of the day, then revival has begun.* Confession means not

The Glory on the Inside

only that the heart has been humbled, but that it has been wholly cleansed. Forgiveness means we acknowledge not only the power of grace for ourselves, but for others. Love means that, for us, all barriers are dissolved, albeit those who seek to oppose us may still have their barriers up. As much as lies within us, we live peaceably with all men. We repeat; in the face of these things, and because of them, *revival has begun*.

We can see then that no one is perfect, no believer is faultless, no spiritual person infallible. Every day grace is needed wholly by us all. Pole-sitting as an escape is wrong; pole-sitting for that withdrawal which gives opportunity for contemplation, enrichment in wisdom, and power for further action can only be commended. Pole-sitting is not fence-sitting, nor is it an escape from the battle. The true pole-sitters will be men and women of the frontiers.

I can assure you, in closing, that Stephen is glad that I have told you the story of his descent from the pole. He had bidden me to do so, and this I have done. I also tell you that he is in instant anticipation of holy revival, believing that at any moment it can break upon us.

Well then, pole-sitters of the world, be wise, descend, be humbled, be glad of grace, and look for the glory of the Lord to spread across our land! And lest you think that what I have said is some kind of spiritual jingoism, a human attempt to stir men and women emotionally, then let me tell you that when revival comes to the church, and renews it to its *norm* of holiness, love and power then something has happened in the history of man which is of prime importance. It goes beyond a shrill self-justifying cry, 'See, I told you!' It goes beyond the vindication of a visionary of revival and comes to revival itself.

Revival is not merely a sudden outbreak of joy, a new surge of vitality, a refreshing of the saints, and a renewing of old and broken relationships. It is all these things, but much more. It is at once the judgement of God upon the dryness, apathy and lassitude of the earth. It is a sudden sensitising to evil, to a new and almost terrifying discernment of the depths into which the church and the land has sunk. The great truth of God bears down upon many who

The Descent of Stephen Stylites

are unsuspecting of its arrival. Just as sudden flash floods overwhelm careless travellers, or fires break out and explode in dry places, and as waters swill across lowland and rise to inundate all, so too revival comes as the most critical of God's gifts. It is irresistible in its impact; no one can gainsay it. Those who have lost their first love and become immersed in the gloom of legal works are called to repentance. Those who have mislaid their joy are taken through the processes of repentance, brokenness, contrition and confession and brought to the other side of grace where there is unutterable joy and new power to proclaim the same grace.

When revival comes men and women wonder what kind of lives they had been living. They see how far the land and nation had receded from its former godliness. The spirit of immorality, inordinate desire for pleasure, consumption of drugs and alcohol, addiction to gambling and other expressions of evil suddenly are unmasked, and a true fear strikes where it should. This discernment is one of the forerunners and fruits of revival. When renewal comes it is strong and deep and lasting.

As we have said, the church is restored to its true—though not yet perfect—state. Without doubt the powerful phenomena of revival do not continue to be the daily *modus operandi* of church. They are used by God to renew His people, who in turn are to be salt and light to their nation. The fires burn out the dross—or, anyway, much of it. The floods recede, having soaked the land to its depths. Fires and floods regenerate that over which they pass and what matters is this new life they bring. A renewed people and a renewed church are the gifts of God.

Think kindly, then, of men and women who are like Stephen. They have had to go through their suffering not only because of their own intemperate reactions, their own foolishness and failure, and not because the truth was unable to make them and others wholly free. What they have suffered now brings them to an idolatry-free understanding of the truth. They have been tempered in the fire, and their metal is toughened—so to speak. What they have learned in their stylitic hours is what now equips them to be persons of faith in the strange and dangerous days of revival; for

The Glory on the Inside

when revival comes (in its unaccustomed ways), so also all the powers of darkness gather about it, to counterfeit and mimic the acts and works of God. Only those who live closely to God and have the simplicity of the Kingdom will know how to distinguish the false from the true, the eccentric from the genuine. Stylitic contemplation can equip men and women 'for such an hour as this'. It is so small a price to pay in the vast accountancy of grace.

For this reason we bid the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to a spirit which is not critical of one another, but the Spirit of love and power and a sound mind. As our friend Stephen discerned, not only are great days ahead of us, but they are upon us, even now. They are the true days of God and His glorious Gospel. They are the only true days a human being can know.

3

Vicki

the

Gentle Teacher

Vicki, the main character in this gentle drama, was—and is—a real person. She was born in an Adelaide suburb. We are often critical of those who live suburban life, as though such life is mediocre, bland, without much point. Vicki—as also others—gives the lie to this mistaken thought. She, her parents, her family and her friends—with countless others—have caught the reality of life in the love of God.

Vicki, though gentle, and generally full of fun and laughter, was a persistent person. Under her gentleness there was a steady purpose, and she was unswerving in it. Any attempt to idealise her, or sensationalise her life will not stick. She was a simple person, but the simplicity of her was a real witness to the truth.

Over the eleven years since her death no one has sought to canonise her. If she was a saint as we imagine saints, then it was of the order of Brother Laurence with a faint dash of St Francis of Assisi. In fact she was just an ordinary young woman who did not fight desperately for life—against death. The life that was in her—the life of Christ, the life of grace—was enough for her.

She showed us how beautiful this can be, how strong it is, and that its goal is glory.



Vicki's Vision

Stood I in heaven's halls
Soft was the glory,
Yet reassuring. Stood I amazed
Yet not bewildered in the quietness.
Seemed I alone, yet not alone.
No pain to sweep the mind
Nor anguish, wearying the body,
But just the quiet, the quietness.

Nor need I raise my eyes
In fearful feel of judgement,
Looking down long avenues
Of never-ending, oft-repeated
Dreary failure. A sweeter sight
Than conscience promised;
Of nothing done in spite or hate
Or evil or impurity. Nothing!

Cross-glory is the cleansing,
Cross-purity more brilliant
Than human mind conceives. Back,
Back to the primal innocence,
The pristine beauty of the image
Of the eternal, the faithful Creator.
Here in heaven's hall has dropped away
Tension upon tension. Only peace
Pervades the once weary mind.

The heart leaps up in joy
Beholding the King. His joy
Leaps down to cover and sustain

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

This first great meeting. Partly I knew,
Had known in days of prayer, fumbling,
Seeking His face through many veils,
Protected by darkness of intensest light,
Partly I had known. But now
It is seeing, face-to-face.

The other impression—fleeting
Yet permanent—of beings angelic
And beings human as more than human—
Since such smiles of joy are rare
In substantial cosmic scenes. Then
Incredible joy liting down like showers
In a soft summer. Sudden understanding too
Of His true nature, and love's.
Knowing that to truly be is to be
As God Who's love; never a pain
Of human guile; never an evil
Of disunion or disparity; only love
As God is love.

Then the recall to life.
Back to the bed of pain, the human scene,
The strange surprise of bed, the room,
The earth's familiar light, and her—
The mother one—and him the father,
And the family. Now all the same
But different. A new meaning to the
Life about, and death-to-come. A new
Deep understanding so that death
Is love invited, and life is now
Not life, nor death, and both
Are the one, the amazing
And incredible one.

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

Her Story

As I write these words her eyes are smiling at me. They are smiling out of a photograph, but the photograph is alive. Vicki was always a live person, filled with a genuine vibrancy, one of those rare persons who is honest and simple and sincere.

Paul, the apostle, had a term for such persons: ‘without wax’. The makers of beautiful furniture would insert a little wax to cover up holes in the timber, and would polish over it, but one day, under stress, the holes would appear. I don’t want to give the impression that Vicki was faultless, because this was not the case, but her single-mindedness was unusual. She was a simple person, the kind that Jesus described as ‘little children’, the true entrants to the Kingdom of God, the genuine embers of that great polity.

The photograph tells me afresh that Vicki shared the family likeness of both parents. She was a remarkable fusion of the two. Jack—her father—is what I call ‘a no-nonsense man’, direct, even to the point of abruptness, impatient of insincerity, and always looking for more of the truth. During the war he served on the ground staff of the Royal Australian Air Force, seeing duty in the Pacific War Zone. Lorrie—Vicki’s mother—has some of the same characteristics as her husband. She too is impatient of human affectations, dissembling and the like. Her wartime service as a typist-clerk in the Rationing Commission brought her into contact

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

with plenty of life. It is not for me to try to assess how two strong-minded people come together and make a marriage, but they both had the materials of humanity to set up a good family dynasty.

Vicki was not the eldest in the family. Their first child is Robert. He is a man of tenacity and purpose, qualities which have enabled him to achieve his goal as an electronics technician, to go on to be a local councillor, and then to become a member of Parliament in his State. Vicki followed him into this world—on July the 22nd 1949, to be precise. Life was not easy in those early days when the family lived with Jack's parents for some years until they could build their own home. In 1954 daughter Anne was born, and in 1956 son Michael. Years later came Lynne and Daniel—more of the merry-eyed Randalls—to complete the family of dynamic personalities.

Jack and Lorrie had both had contacts with the church. Jack was a stolid Anglican and Lorrie an indolent Methodist but, as parents, the two had felt no attraction to churches. However, they did go along to listen in 1959 when Methodist evangelist Joe Blinco came to Adelaide to conduct meetings in the Billy Graham evangelistic crusade. This son of Cornish mining people was a bluff man of honour. He revelled in what God had done for him in lifting him from a humble mining community and giving him a message for the world. Gifted as he was, he did not seem to touch the equally bluff Jack, father of the gentle Vicki and the stolid young Robert.

In a way, this was understandable. It was not easy to get to Jack Randall. He had a marriage that was now an unhappy one. He and Lorrie had decided they were incompatible. Both were strong-minded people and they clashed violently. Neither would give way to the other. Their partnership was virtually shattered; affection lay inert, and Lorrie decided the union was dead. Divorce seemed the only way out.

Not everyone connected with the family was content to let it go at that, though. Active in their lives was Lorrie's sister, Pam, another remarkable person. Less sophisticated than her older sister, she ached for the marriage to hold together, and for the two strong-minded persons to somehow achieve a new love. In her own way

The Glory on the Inside

she, too, was strong-minded. She had entered the Adelaide Bible Institute, but long before that she had set out to win Jack and Lorrie to a new life. They were living on, without God and without much joy. They seemed fated—along with innumerable other suburban dwellers—to be set for the monotony of pointless living, mediocrity and the tiring wrangle of unchanging incompatibility. Nothing more dreary and sterile could be imagined.

It was in this hopeless scene that Pam worked earnestly to change the lives of the family. Maybe Jack was amused, but he argued seriously, and interminably. There is nothing more confronting than a Bible College student. To many, they must seem to be human pests that require the strongest form of pesticide to discourage or destroy them; but Pam seemed indestructible. Jack's arguments made little impression. This younger sister seemed unable to give up.

Hence Jack's grim insistence on going to the Crusade. He was not sure whether he despised it or feared it. He listened in silence to the Methodist evangelist, but each time, came away untouched. It was different, however, when Billy Graham came to Adelaide to complete the mission. That night Jack, Robert and Vicki were at the meeting in the Wayville Showground. They were seated on the grass, on a rug, caught up in some of the atmosphere of a great rally. Jack invited some strangers on to the rug, and they all sat, sometimes singing, at other times listening to the remarkable voice of Beverly Shea, and finally to the voice of the famous preacher, Graham.

Even then Jack was not much impressed. He had his own ideas and was sticking to them. God wasn't real to him; what, after all, had life given to him? His broken marriage was always on his mind. Relating to children and fathering them is not easy when there is no basic partnership between the parents. So Jack sat, listening to what the preacher was saying, but feeling no impact from it.

Then, suddenly, it all happened—so suddenly that Jack was bewildered. He had no idea, initially, of responding to the evangelist's appeal. After all, what had the man said that had convinced

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

him? So far as he knew, nothing! But it was what was happening to Robert and Vicki that touched his heart. He could see they had been gripped by the message and by the power of the man out at the front. When the appeal was being made, they were responding wholly, and they seemed oblivious to their bewildered father. They were going to go forward. Both of them rose. At that point, Jack felt an unusual power grip him too. Somehow—although he did not know why—he had to go with the children. He could not explain the hope that was suddenly born in him. It swept him along.

The others—the strangers—sat unmoved on the rug. Jack's mind moved quickly. He would have to go with the children; he had better take the rug. He made a gesture to the little group, grabbed the rug, sweeping them off, and started after his children.

'Hey!' he cried, 'wait for me!'

Something had happened. What it was, was not altogether clear to the father, but the two children had abruptly left their old lives and were started out on a new path. So had Jack, for that matter, but his mind had to puzzle its way through to full understanding. Pam's prayers had aroused the sleeping man. A new marriage was in the making. Three of the family had been welded together.

Lorrie—who had not gone to the meeting—was uncomprehending, suspicious, and not at all impressed. She was out on a limb. What puzzled her most was why Jack, who had been ill with 'flu, should have gotten off his bed at all, and gone out, imperilling his health. She thought it was crazy, dangerous and pointless. What could 'religion' possibly do for her? Their marriage was virtually finished; her young sister Pam was crazy, and life held little or no future. The change in events only made her glum. She little knew that ideal conditions had been set up for a rich transformation of her life. Brought to the end of her tether, gradually being impressed by the change in her children and husband—and a bit astonished by the new affinity between them and Pam—she reluctantly began to give way to the new era. She would still read the *Women's Weekly* rather than the black-covered Bibles of her family, and she was not going to be forced into anything; but even so, there was a wistfulness in her spirit. She sensed that she needed what they now

The Glory on the Inside

had, but it was hard for her human spirit to tag behind her husband and children.

Whatever her motives, she decided to go along with them, at least to satisfy her curiosity. She had not been able to ignore Pam. The difference between the lives of the two sisters was too great to be overlooked. So she accompanied her family to the Anglican Church in North Terrace, Adelaide. There was a crusade which followed on from the Graham Crusade. It was there that Lorrie went forward in response to an appeal but, as she later said, she had only done that to signify publicly what had already happened. It had not happened just in that one meeting, but that meeting served to climax the weeks and months of deep thinking, arguing, and—finally—surrender.

Vicki—with Robert—was one who had argued with her father Jack before he came into the new way of life through Christ. She had joined Pam as that Bible College student had pressed her brother-in-law with the high claims of the Christian truth. Her mind was quick to grasp the reality of the life and death of the man Jesus, and her going forward at the evangelistic mission was not surprising. Long ago—even before Pam’s pain for her relatives—Vicki had known, deep down, that God is love, and that somehow the world and life have rich meaning. What she had may roughly be called ‘a genius for the truth’. It just seems to happen with some; others struggle to grasp its inner reality. Robert was a bit like his dad, plugging away, delving as deeply as possible both with mind and heart, until his understanding was built on an immovable foundation.

The Randall marriage was saved. Evangelists like Billy Graham are often criticised. Their mass-evangelism methods come under rapid fire from their critics, but for the most part the critics remain uninformed. If they were to discover how many marriages have been saved from destruction by the Gospel of love, they would be less fierce in their condemnation. I have come into contact with many families who have discovered what true familyhood is,

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

through the simple matter of one or more members being drawn into the Kingdom of God.

Given in that Christ was now Lord of the family, things were not altogether easy. Jack was the breadwinner and his wages were not high. The family lived fairly close to the breadline. Luxuries were almost unknown. Economically, life was a struggle. In 1962 another daughter came—Lynne—and five years later a son named Daniel. The family learned to share what they had, sometimes feeling the pinch and at other times having a sense of deep pleasure at a chance luxury. All in all they were good days, sometimes the seas being rough, sometimes beautifully calm and even idyllic. For a while, following the events which happened at Wayville Showground, the family attended the church where Vicki had been worshipping, St. Athanasius at Kidman Park. Those were special days, for the Kidman Park Church had virtually been initiated by members of the North Terrace Anglican Church. The family had a common centre for worship. Some years later they were drawn to another church—this time a Baptist congregation—where they enjoyed another kind of family warmth.

Vicki lived by some inner spiritual compass, always seeking to be orientated to the will of God. At the age of seventeen she believed she should undertake training as a nurse. For an Adelaide girl to move to Mount Gambier, so many miles south-east of Adelaide, was no small thing. It was not easy to make a break from her large family, but she moved into her first phase of life away from home. She certainly enjoyed the nursing, and made friends in the district. Years later, when I spoke at a Christian convention, I met some of her old friends who remembered her with love and personal warmth. However, she was unable to cope with the study that nursing demanded and finally she opted to qualify as a nursing aide. In her practical work as a nurse she was quite efficient, and she was deeply drawn to what she was doing.

Somewhere around the time when she qualified as a nursing aide, she met a young man whose home was in Western Australia.

The Glory on the Inside

She took the long journey to that State and worked in a hospital which was close to the home of her new friend. He worked with his parents on a farm where they raised sheep and grew wheat. During this time Vicki became engaged, and doubtless knew happiness. However, she was also in a state of conflict. The matron of the hospital was a fine Christian woman, and she kept an eye on her staff. She discerned that Vicki needed some help, and suggested she should return home for a few weeks. Again she travelled the long distance to Adelaide, seeking to work out the problem which had arisen in her mind, the problem of whether or not she was walking in God's will.

It was at this time that I first met Vicki, during a service at the church where the family attended. My first impressions were of a rather elf-like creature, fairly diminutive, with merry eyes. Even so, she was fairly serious, and somehow, as I had commenced the service with prayer, she suddenly had come to know she must enter Bible College. The call was not a mere emotional and passing impression, but so strong that she had to return to Western Australia and terminate her work.

The decision which she made in the service was not 'off the cuff'. Her mother and father had been attending the Bible College's Adelaide extension courses. These had commenced in 1924 and to the point of writing this story have continued—with minor breaks—for some sixty years. Jack and Lorrie never failed to be there on Monday nights, first in Mead Hall in Flinders Street, and then in the State Theatre in the King William Street central square. Each night Jack would join his tape-recorder to a multitude of others. I can remember feeling like the President of the United States as I taught there and looked down to hundreds of people over the microphones that bristled before me. No teacher ever had a more sympathetic and willing group of hearers.

What had touched Vicki were some tapes Jack had recorded there, on the theme of Christian Discipleship. As she listened to these, she knew a tug back to the single-mindedness of former years. She took it seriously, so seriously that her engagement had to be reconsidered. I can remember how quickly that matter arose.

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

Those were days of conflict and they are vivid in my memory. Her fiancé was a fine young man, and deeply in love with her. We talked about it, and he insisted that he too ought to come into the Bible College. But I had no sense that his call was of the same quality as that which Vicki knew. Quietly and gently I suggested he return to Western Australia and work the matter through. He and Vicki had driven a small Morris 1100 from Perth to Adelaide, across the famous Nullarbor Plains and the long dangerous stretch of unsealed road. Many a fatal accident happened in those days as cars were hidden and drivers blinded by the thick clouds of dust that the rushing traffic created. In addition to the dust, there was the intense heat. Only the brave or the foolhardy undertook such trips, and few would have chosen a Morris 1100!

The Undistracted Learner

One of my favourite terms for Christian discipleship is ‘an undistracted learner’. Vicki, in those early days of going to College, was finding her engagement distracting. She felt she needed to be free to do the Father’s will, for by this time God was not just God—some remote, unrelated and stern Deity—but her own Father, loving her, and having His special will for her life, a plan for her to follow.

I can recall the struggle she had. Some young people are highly emotional without being equally thoughtful. Vicki—as I have said—had some kind of spiritual instinct. She could discern the nature of a situation, and as she did in her own case, it was strongly borne in upon her that she ought to break the engagement. I doubt whether she had any pressure from other persons. If anything, many would have encouraged her to remain engaged, and let things work themselves through. It was possible her fiancé would come fully to see things as she saw them.

I knew at the time that her struggle was only incidentally with the matter of her engagement. Doubtless she longed for marriage as much as any woman would, and must have thought that her fiancé

The Glory on the Inside

could come to as deep an experience of Christ as she was knowing. Her real struggle was over the matter of a life that was completely surrendered to God, wholly in His hands, without regret and, in fact, with deep joy. I watched the struggle, having little to say except when she asked counsel. Even then I was loath to say much. She had to work the matter through with her Father.

I have met many who have had the same struggle as Vicki, though not always in the matter of breaking an engagement. I have never seen a person who has taken the matter of discipleship more deeply, seriously and definitely than she did. I have to say that I have met others who have come to the same total commitment that was hers, but I doubt that it is possible for one to go beyond the degree of her surrender. Certainly she was not unique, for others have known what she knew, but her life never seemed to waver from that point onwards. It did not, of course, guarantee perfection of living, but she travelled only in the direction that her compass was set. Those who lived with her knew that. None of us dreamed—and certainly not Vicki herself—that within a few short years she would die. The years that were opening before her then seemed rich with promise and a full experience of the plan that God had prepared for her. Her decision seemed to have opened up vast vistas of beauty, and incredible hours shared in the love of the Father. It is not exaggerating the matter to say that she shone with the truth, and that this happened in the context of fun and laughter. I think most of us remember her merry eyes almost beyond any other feature of her life.

This deeper penetration into the love of the Father was not limited to only this one member of the family. I can remember Pam and her husband (she had married a fellow-student) having their own marital struggles at the time, but breaking through eventually into a new and rich relationship. Jack and Lorrie were deeply affected by Vicki's experience, and they began to heap up the riches of truth for themselves with renewed vigour. Nor were they simply preoccupied with themselves. Their home was open to a flow of students. They sought to share the things of faith which were new and fresh to them. Some were a bit appalled by their

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

enthusiasm, and some doubtless felt threatened. Even so they persisted.

Looking back, many of us know that they were participating in a much more extensive movement than would have been apparent to them at the time. Those years from 1969–72 were years when there seemed to be a special freshness in the things of truth and faith. They were like a vibrant spring that promises a warm and fruitful summer. Anticipation was in the air. The churches were feeling more than a breath of God, something greater than merely a mild stirring. My own memories of the Randalls, their friends, and hundreds of others at the Monday night gatherings, are very rich. It was during this time, 1969 in fact, when the remarkable mission just ‘happened’ at Wudinna. The minister of the Methodist circuit—the Reverend Deane Meatheringham—was quizzed at the Methodist Annual Conference as to what had occurred. He said, ‘We planned a mission. We asked Geoff Bingham and a team to come from the Bible College. They came. We had planned a mission but *God got out of hand!*’

God was being ‘out of hand’ in so many other places in those years. In the midst of these events, Vicki was having her own impact upon her fellow students, although few of us sensed it at the time. We simply knew that she was a person whose life was wrapped up in the Father and the Son, and that she was gently and fully a person of the Spirit of love. In July of 1970 she celebrated her twenty-first birthday. There were few flags, trumpets or gun-salutes, but some of the students crowded into the Randall home for a happy supper.

Being a father of five daughters, and so knowing the levels of maturity young women achieve, I can say with certainty that in spiritual perception, Vicki was unusually mature for her age. Her wide-margin Bible has copious notes on the books she studied. Some of these she did in the two years of her Bible College studies. Genesis is well annotated, and much of the book of Numbers. Parts of Job have marginal commentaries and the Psalms are well thumbbed, some of them being studied in fine detail. The book of Proverbs has regular marginal notes, whilst Ecclesiastes and the

The Glory on the Inside

Song of Solomon have some fine written comments. One which particularly struck me reads:

Agape love is not an emotion, but a dynamic energy, expressing itself in unselfish service. It is a violent and vigorous passion.

No matter what its origin, it helps us to see something of her approach to the book, and to love. It may have been a thought copied from somewhere; it could equally have been original, as that would have been consistent with the fine set of her mind. Either way it is clear that there was nothing superficial about her approach to the books of the Bible, or her understanding of love.

Vicki had given her attention to the prophets. It seems that she studied Jeremiah very closely, and that she also concentrated upon the minor prophets. The promise passages of Isaiah—sections which predict the blessing God will pour out upon His people as He revives them—are underlined and in some cases commented upon. Amongst the minor prophets Habakkuk has been well studied, a fact to which we shall later return, for Vicki's heart was undoubtedly set on the gift of revival from God.

In the New Testament she closely studied Matthew's Gospel, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the first few chapters of Romans, and the letters to the Galatians, the Philippians, and the Colossians. Part of the Hebrews epistle, along with James, and Peter's first epistle also received detailed attention. There are passages scattered throughout the whole Bible which she studied and noted. Doubtless, much of what was dear and helpful to her was left unannotated. It does not matter. If she retained only a few degrees of what she studied, then she must have had an excellent grasp of Scripture, in which her concentration was primarily on the nature of God and the nature of man. This is why her life and ministry was so practical, so little gripped by mere abstractions.

In October of that year, Vicki noticed a change in the look of a mole on the right side of her face. Slightly disturbed, but perhaps

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

more curious, she visited the local general practitioner, who referred her to a specialist. He took a test and said he would notify her of his findings within the week. She and the family, together, set themselves to wait for his report.

That week was significant in more ways than one. The Saturday saw the whole family at the annual church picnic, and in the evening, at the Randall home, there was a gathering of those who were deeply interested in God's renewal of the church. Those who attended were aware of something special happening, and the meeting, in itself, was a deep and intimate expression of the hunger many had towards the end of the 1960s. On the one hand there was a sense of the utter dryness of the land, not only the Australian community at large, but also the churches. The new affluence was making its inroads. The restlessness of young people, the increase in the use of drugs, the new permissiveness in morals and ethics, and the breakdown of marital and family relationships were the strong signs of social and moral decline. Families were breaking up, and even within the churches, folk were shocked by the inability of respected couples to keep their marriages together.

At the same time there was the warm expectancy of which we have spoken. Somehow God would visit His people, and urge them on to a new understanding of His grace and His love. I can well remember, personally, the growing response of folk within the churches. Attendances at the Monday night lectures were remarkable. From 1967 there had been a steady climb from about one hundred people to well over two hundred, and then by 1973 well over three hundred commenced the year's studies. What was even more remarkable was that about ninety per cent of those attending were engaged in some form or other of Christian work. They were not like spiritual blotting paper, absorbing everything and remaining dry. In fact, as the years have gone by, the results of those study nights have often been seen in remarkable ways.

Many look back to them as a time of the setting of the truth within them.

The meeting that Saturday night was a significant one, even if it was humble enough in its form. The group thumbed through a

The Glory on the Inside

number of Scriptures, some of them relating to God's promises of refreshment and renewal for His people. Vicki was at the heart of the study that night, and one of the Scriptures that made itself memorable was the passage of Habakkuk 2:1–4:

I will take my stand to watch, and station myself on the tower, and look forth to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. And the LORD answered me

‘Write the vision;
make it plain upon tablets,
so he may run who reads it.
For still the vision awaits its time:
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.
If it seem slow, wait for it;
it will surely come, it will not delay.
Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.’

No less powerful to them was the cry of the prophet in 3:2:

O LORD, I have heard the report of thee,
and thy work, O LORD, do I fear.
In the midst of the years renew it;
in the midst of the years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy.

Lorrie, when she reflects about that night, smiles gently. ‘We knew God had given us a promise of revival, but in one way we scarcely knew what it meant.’ Looking at me she said, ‘It was years later that you gave us teaching on revival, and we came to know what it meant, but even so we were gripped that night. God told me very clearly that we were to wait, even if it seemed slow in coming. In fact it was coming swiftly from God's point of view.’

I too can look back to the very first year in South Australia when we studied the epistle to the Galatians. I have been reminded by others of words I said in those days: ‘The church in our land is

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

caught up in the malaise of the Galatian heresy. We do not really understand justification by faith. We have some kind of notion concerning it, but if we really knew it, how our hearts would blaze! We would give up our self-justifying activities in the churches. We would be living by faith.’

This, of course, is the thought in Habakkuk 2:4, ‘the just shall live by his faith’ (AV), or ‘the righteous shall live by his faith’ (RSV), or ‘the righteous man shall live by being faithful’ (NEB), or ‘the upright man will live by his faithfulness’ (JB). Paul and the writer of Hebrews have both used this verse in different ways. Paul built his great doctrine of justification by faith on it, and the writer of Hebrews urged his wavering readers to go on in the life of faith by unwavering faithfulness (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11).

What then were they thinking in that joyful and living group on that Saturday night in October 1970? The great movements of God do not always begin in vast rallies, in the excitement of big campaigns, but often in one heart gripped with sorrow for the evil of the world, and filled with yearning for the churches. It is true that Christ walks amongst the churches. Vicki has a comment beside the verse which tells us this (Revelation 1:12):

‘Lampstand’—separate to show responsibility of each church. The risen Christ is still the Son of man, wearing gown and apparel of priesthood; the same vision that Daniel received.

Christ stirs some spirit in a church, and the yearning for revival commences. I have no doubt that the group—consciously with some, unconsciously with others—received the promise of revival that night.

It is at this point of the story that I must intrude myself. In the early 1950s I was rector of the Garrison church in Sydney. It was situated at Millers Point, and known in those days grimly as ‘the Rocks area’. There, my wife Laurel and I both received a rich revelation of God’s love in Christ and His Cross. We needed such a revelation,

The Glory on the Inside

for though our marriage was reasonably secure, I was quite headstrong in the ministry I was exercising. Brought up as an evangelical person, having my faith tested in a prison camp during the war, emerging afresh as a man of the Scriptures, I knew that something of the doctrine I held was dry, factual, and in some ways without the dews of fresh, personal love upon it. In my need I discovered a book which took me into a richer and deeper understanding of the Cross. I was crushed by the revelation of my own self-assertiveness, my own human planning of a divine ministry. In the toils of an all-night conflict with God, I felt that I wanted to die. Morning found me physically spent and exhausted. As I consciously surrendered my will to the loving care of God I tasted a little of the trust that Christ had when he said on the Cross, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'. Then, at last, I slept—the peaceful sleep of a small and trustful child. When I awoke it was to a sense of quiet joy and incredible serenity. Many, many years before I had come to know the joyful truth and experience of forgiveness. Now I knew, in an even richer way, the peace of being in the hands of God.

The results of this experience were both beautiful and appalling. On the one hand, on the nights which followed, I could scarcely sleep for the wonder of the new discovery I was making in the Scriptures. I could manage only a few hours sleep per night. My wife Laurel had made similar discoveries and we were very much one together. However, our congregation dwindled rapidly. We were accused of heresy. One of these was the heresy of sinless perfection, a charge that a genuine sinless perfectionist laughed at. She came to hear me because she was thrilled that another had joined the ranks of her group.

'Him!' she said scornfully. 'Him a sinless perfectionist! Not likely. He doesn't understand what this truth is, much less practise it.'

There were dark days when friends slipped away and dropped their contacts with us. At the same time amazing things began to happen. The numbers at the Tuesday evening Bible class suddenly began to rise. From a small group of twelve it rapidly grew to over sixty, and then even higher, folk sitting in the church pews for two

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

hours, and not seeming to notice it. Other wonderful things were happening. Night after night people who felt the barrenness of their lives would ring me, and make their way to our home, even in the early hours of the morning. A group of clergy and laity would meet monthly in a quiet place away from the demanding telephone, to study the Scriptures, to share the truth and its life, and to ask God for renewal of the nation. Because Australia had never known a true revival, we were asking God to visit our land and heal it.

Recently, when I was talking to a clergyman who was a participant in those days, he said to me, ‘I have never forgotten the monthly all-night prayers we had in the vestry at Holy Trinity Church, Millers Point. I still believe God is answering that prayer and that it may be soon that we will see and hear the answer.’ This is the reason for the intrusion into the story of Vicki Randall. In fact it is no intrusion, for it is part of that story. It was Vicki Randall’s life—and death—which brought a dynamic renewal in my life concerning the things of faith. As I think about it now, I marvel at the strange but wonderful pattern which God has woven, and—for that matter—is still weaving.

It may seem that the prominence given to that October prayer-night gathering is excessive. Perhaps it is. Doubtless, not only in Adelaide and South Australia, but in many places of our land, there have been similar gatherings where God has spoken to His people about reviving His church. Those verses in Habakkuk are dear to many faithful children of the Father. Yet the glimmer of light which appeared on that night is quite significant. I can remember the many times Vicki spoke about revival, particularly in her last days on earth.

A week after her biopsy, Lorrie was told that Vicki’s mole was a live melanoma. She had cancer. Lorrie was stunned and rang me, and I communicated the news to Vicki, who was not surprised, but of course somewhat shocked. Because surgery was urgently needed, Vicki was quickly operated upon. I can remember the prayer meeting in the chapel which we called to pray especially for

The Glory on the Inside

her. Because it was impossible to know Vicki without relating to her in love, there were tears as we prayed. There was also a quiet confidence that she would be healed. The surgeon later said that it was an especially malignant form of cancer. Certainly it had gone down deeply into the lymphatic glands, and the cutting back was severe. A skin graft was also needed, and because of Vicki's excessive bleeding this was difficult. Prayer supported each occasion of surgery. Whilst Vicki had been somewhat strained at the time of the biopsy, she was now quite serene. The partial facial disfigurement caused by the surgery did not seem to trouble her; her serenity remained untouched.

Christians have an unfortunate habit of looking at one another, detecting the weaknesses and failures of their fellow believers. Doubtless some wondered why she was a bit uptight before the news of her cancer; but in fact Vicki for some time had had visions of ministry in missionary work. One time it would be thoughts of Asia, and another time a desire to work amongst the Australian Aborigines. A rich and beautiful vista spread out before her, a lifetime chock full of loving service for her Lord, and for those in need. It was no wonder that the possibility of cancer pulled her up with a start. She needed a quick re-orientation, and that was not a simple matter. Even so, she rapidly accepted the new situation. I have no doubt that the principal surrender she had made over the matter of her call to Bible College and the breaking of her engagement was what helped her to adapt so quickly.

Vicki's recovery from the operation was little less than remarkable. She stayed at home and a close friend would drive her in to the city when needed, particularly in relation to the skin graft. The same friend even lent her a 'little blue car' for her other trips to and from College. (The 'little blue car' became associated with her.) Vicki herself, though a hardy spirit, was diminutive as a person, and her puckishness invited continual teasing. Her large Bible, bound into an even larger folder-cover, made one of the men students say, 'So small a girl; so large a Bible!'

Memory now returns of the male students who were attracted by her. A fresh engagement could have quickly taken place, but she

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

held out firmly. Even when—towards the last—the cancer was claiming her, one young man wanted desperately to marry her. I have no doubt that his love for Vicki went beyond even that of a man for a woman, even though it certainly included that. Although she herself never set out to be popular, she seemed to have only friends amongst the students and staff.

I think the most vivid memory I have of Vicki was when she accompanied me to the Portland Christian Convention at the end of January 1971. Portland is a long way from Victor Harbour, over five hundred kilometres in fact. As we drove she was full of joy. Somehow, in the last two years of her life, she felt called to have a special prayer ministry of support for me. I can remember being quietly encouraged as she ferreted out the needs for which to pray. I can also remember her primary insistence upon the need for revival in the churches. These themes would come up, time and again. She had a beautiful grip on the theme of grace, or rather grace had its beautiful grip on her. I am sure it was this which gave her the serenity that she had. However, she was in no way bland in her faith. There was nothing of the quietist in her. In fact she was an intrepid fighter. She would attack what she saw was wrong, and support what she knew to be truth. A person such as myself often has people who wish to help, but sometimes they can be ‘fans’, can indulge in adulation. In her guileless way Vicki was too shrewd to be caught in this pattern. She would persistently ask me why I held certain views, and took certain actions. I never detected adulation of any kind. Her first love was for her Lord, and all other loves found their place in this master-love. In a way, she was relentless when pursuing the truth, not as an abstraction, but in the concreteness of life and action. In my own case, she seemed to sense when I was disheartened and would be most supportive. It was as though she felt that God had linked many of us together for the purpose of renewing His people, especially through the dynamic of grace, so irretrievably linked with the work and power of the Atonement.

The Glory on the Inside

The days were very hot as we travelled. I can remember us pulling up from time to time and seeking some shade under the short but luxurious Mallee gums. Once or twice we slept, wearied by the travelling, to awake refreshed and to useful conversation. The theme of the Convention was 'The Love of God' and I was able to give some illustrations from Vicki's life without, of course, mentioning her directly. Vicki had been most helpful to a very intense young woman whose lot in life had been extremely sad. Her marriage had not succeeded and later she took her own life. Vicki once said, in relation to the mistake the young woman had made, 'I thank God I have learned these things now, and that I do not have to go through them later'.

Throughout the year of 1971 Vicki had a profound effect on the student body. They knew she had been close to death, had kept her composure, and that somehow it had increased her love for the Father. Doubtless she puzzled many, especially those who felt that she was away in some special realm of relationship with God. They may have felt themselves more down to earth than Vicki, and in their attitude there may have been something of wistful envy. The fact is that some of her fellow students had deep problems after leaving College. In one or two cases there was failure in marriage, and had they known the rich union that Vicki knew with her Father and His Son, they may well have been spared the suffering that came. On the other hand, many were deeply influenced by her. One later spoke of her as '... a gentle teacher who taught me many things with the compassion of Christ'. Another said, 'I praise God for her who taught me so much and influenced others so much'. She was indeed the gentle teacher. There was little in her of precepts and prescriptions. She witnessed—mostly unconsciously—of a living and practical relationship with her Lord.

From the time of her operation in October 1970, to December 1971, she seemed to have good health. Her home became the gathering place for many of her friends and fellow students. The Randalls loved giving hospitality. Their years of sharing the

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

Word had made them personally rich, although their material gains seemed to be few—if any! Times of fellowship, praise, prayer and the sharing of the Scriptures were encouraging to those who participated. When in December Vicki noticed some small lumps on her face, she was in a fellowship of loving support. At first the local doctor at Victor Harbor thought the lumps were not malignant, and he treated them. In late December and early January, Vicki helped with the cooking at the Port Elliot Beach Mission. A number of students were on the team, and in the hot summer weather Vicki had to battle to carry out her ministry of meals. Without doubt Vicki's health—although almost imperceptibly—was on the decline.

On January 10th, Vicki was admitted to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Woodville. The cancer had manifested itself again. The surgeon who had originally operated believed at the time that he had cut back beyond the malignancy, but of course could not be sure. In February the College resumed, and the study year began. When the students were asked to vote for women Senior Students, Vicki received unqualified support. Hearing the news in hospital she was deeply moved. Her experience of the Father's love was rich and beautiful. Daily the students prayed for her, longing on the one hand that she would be returned to them, and yet wondering, on the other hand, whether that could ever happen. In any case, she continued to have a significant ministry to those who visited her. There was no shortage of these—friends, fellow students and relatives. One of the latter was her Auntie Jean. She came one day when a fellow student—Diane McKenzie—was chatting with Vicki. Unknown to the both of them, there had been a quiet movement of God's Spirit in the aunt. It was Vicki's life—and, later, death—which deeply impressed her aunt, and the result would be that she would come to know the same power of life that Vicki was exhibiting. Who can say just how many people were similarly influenced by this same vitality?

Later in the month—January the 26th—Vicki returned home. She was not able, of course, to go back to College, but she set about living as a real person, without self-pity. She preferred to get

The Glory on the Inside

herself a meal when she felt like it, and to desist from eating when she had no desire for food. She looked for no special treatment. At times her sickness caused her to be quiet and apart from others. She loved to lie and listen to taped hymns and songs. The College had its own recording studio, and she was able to listen to the studies being given at that time. She revelled in the exposition of the letter to the Ephesians. Sometimes I was able to visit her, and remember now how gentle she seemed, how quiet and serene.

In the midst of all this, her prayer life deepened. It was her old spiritual instinct at work again, as though she knew she had a limited number of hours and wanted to employ them usefully. Even so, there was no spirit of hastiness or panic. There was no overburden of guilt or fear which drove her on to ceaseless works. Her prayer rose from serenity, as prayer also brought deepening tranquillity. She deliberately concentrated on her own family, and then prayed beyond her family. Her yearning for revival never waned. Sometimes she spoke about it; sometimes not. As I remember her speaking about it, it was not something that was going to be dropped from the skies, but would come as a result of the teaching of the grace of God in Christ and his Atonement. At the same time she placed great store by the life lived in the Spirit, and—although these are probably not her words—‘by the Spirit applying the work of the Cross and the Resurrection, so that the church might come alive and share its life with others’.

Auntie Jean wanted to help Vicki, and she came for this purpose. She was a transformed person herself. She had come into the Kingdom of love. She knew the freedom of which we have just spoken. Vicki recognised this, and a richer relationship grew between the two.

It was about that time that Vicki began to weaken. Adjustments had to be made to cope with these changing circumstances, and there were some accompanying difficulties. One day she felt unusually hot, and at the same time very weak, so she decided to have a bath and cool off. When Lorrie went to help her they were

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

confronted with a problem. Small as she was, she was too heavy for Lorrie to help her out of the bath. Vicki was so utterly weak that she could do nothing. The problem seemed insurmountable. Then came a ring at the door, and there was Nell, an old friend and neighbour, who had returned for a visit with the family. Her coming was just on time. She had some knowledge of lifting, and between her and Lorrie, Vicki was hoisted out. Lifting Vicki brought back memories to Nell who had known her as a small child, and had loved her dearly. Even such simple, day-to-day events served in enriching relationships within the family and their circle of friends, and in demonstrating the Father's care for them down to the smallest detail.

Those last months were family months. The weather had continued to be hot, and the Randalls did not possess a fan. A friend lent one for Vicki's use, and this helped during the day. At night the family would sit together on the back lawn, looking up at the stars and reminiscing about the past. They were memorable family times. Anne by now was eighteen, learning to make her way in a world which was changing so rapidly and so radically. Michael, at sixteen years, was still at school, and Lynne, aged ten, was in grade five. The bright and chirpy young Daniel, whose smiles and grins closely matched those of Vicki, was aged four and, of course, at home. Robert, away on technical work with Telecom in Darwin, was finding his life changing. We had met in those years at missions I had conducted in that northernmost city, and Robert was making his way through new realms of theology. Not only was he discovering the world of men like Francis Schaeffer and many of the Puritans and Reformers, but he was in contact with a number of creative Christians. Two of them—Colin and Jan Stringer—had been in Victor Harbor, and through contacts with us had come to know Christ. They had left the Jehovah's Witnesses sect, and joined in the life of the local churches. After a time they had moved to Darwin where Colin became famous for his sports store, his knowledge of fishing, and his discovered gift of journalism. Little did Robert know at that time that he was moving towards a life of full community involvement. In any

The Glory on the Inside

case, the family had turned its gaze wholly to Vicki. Being a no-fuss family, they let her be, but their love for her was very evident.

It was about this time that the subject of healing presented itself. It was natural enough to talk about it. Prayers for healing were part of the life of the College, as indeed they ought to be part of the life of the churches. On one occasion, Lorrie and Vicki discussed the subject. Somehow it all had to do with the Father's will. Neither of these two women—nor father Jack for that matter—were *laissez faire* in their attitudes. They believed without doubt that God *could* heal. Even so, they did not take it for granted—as many often do—that He *would* heal. Vicki and her parents wanted to know and do the will of God. If not being healed was somehow part of that, then they were content to accept that.

It was about that time that Vicki heard Daniel trying to play a toy guitar and sing at the same time. What she heard was:

But Jesus the kind Shepherd found me,
And now I am on my way home.

'On my way home.' The words suddenly struck Vicki. In fact they pierced sweetly into her. 'Of course!' she said to herself. 'And I am to go home *in His time*.'

The timing of those events is not clear in my mind. The last thing any of us were thinking about was to write Vicki's story. We just lived in the daily and gentle miracle of it. Some people are pleasing to sight and mind, and joy flows as we come into contact with them. Vicki was one of these, and so it was a warm experience for us to welcome Vicki into our home for a time. Laurel had trained as a nursing sister, and so was able to care for her. She had come the fifty miles from Adelaide to stay with us, and to share with her fellow students. She had not been able to return as a Senior

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

Student, but was a senior person in love and wisdom. So much had the past months taught her that she longed to share it with others.

The students came to be with her, most with a sense of awe, some with tears, but when they left they had been enriched. Whilst we sought to keep the visits within the limits which the waning strength of the sick woman would allow, she somehow managed to minister to all who came. Her words had power not only because of the credibility she had built up with the student body, but because of simple sincerity and newly found wisdom. Good as the atmosphere of the College had been, a deeper dimension flowed into our communal life. Lectures and chapel services were somehow different. However, as she shared her spiritual dynamic with us in this way, her little remaining physical strength began to ebb.

It is strange that even to that point, Vicki was not aware that she was dying; not, anyway, in a primary sense. Lorrie and Jack rang me, during that time, and told me the doctors' prognosis. Some have the view that dying people ought not to be informed, but left to live quietly through the remaining days. I knew Vicki trusted the Father completely. The news of death would not disturb her. Nor did it. When I talked with her, I saw her register faint surprise and then recognition of the truth.

She said, 'I don't want to want to go more than I want to stay. I don't want to go or stay unless that is what He wants. I only want what He wants.'

I know that universally the human race fears death. For some it is quite plainly the dread of judgement. For some it appears to be fear of the unknown. For most of us, life—with all its problems and difficulties—is still desirable. I can say that I have never seen anyone sit so loosely to both life and death. In this sense Vicki was in a state of equipoise. In another sense there was no balance at all. The Father was so real to her that staying or going made no difference. Only what God wanted could make any difference.

Writing a story like that of Vicki's life and death cannot be mere reportage, although it must contain reportage. Any element of exaggeration or wrongful development of the dramatic would be out of context with Vicki's life. I must be honest and say that the

The Glory on the Inside

witness of Vicki's life had a profound effect on me. I am aware, and have already recounted, how her life touched many folk, and did this quite deeply. For me it was the action which changed the direction in which I was moving. You must pardon me, then, if I take time off from telling this story to share a little more of my own.

Paul has a powerful statement in the seventh chapter of his first letter to the church at Corinth. He is speaking about the now-time, the moment in which we are living. Paul was the last person to reject the richness of life, and living within the world which is God's creation. He says in another place, 'He [God] has given us all things richly to enjoy', and 'Everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed'. He has a high view of creation, for quoting the Psalmist he repeats, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof'.¹ Even so, Paul says:

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29–31).

I can well remember the days in the Japanese prison camp when I was wholly free in my spirit. Trite as it may sound, it is true that:

Walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.

Some of us there achieved freedom in our minds and in our attitudes, and the years left no wounds or scars. Likewise, when we came home, I let myself sit lightly to the material things around

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:26; cf. Psalm 24:1; 1 Timothy 6:17; 4:4.

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

me. So did Laurel my wife. When our lives were revived by a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the Cross, we again hung loose to the world about us. Later we were to go to Pakistan with five children, when I was thirty-eight and Laurel thirty-four. We were not sure what lay ahead of us, and there could be danger. In fact there was something of that, but we did not let things like that concern us. We hung loose, and we knew the power that lies in such freedom from idolatries and dependencies. When we were allowed to share in two powerful revivals in Pakistan, we remained free from such dependencies, and the freedom continued to be potent.

I was shocked as I perceived Vicki's arrival at the same point, and her carefree approach to both life and death. What shook me was the realisation that I had moved from the dimension in which I had previously lived. In some ways, so had Laurel.

My roots were deeply down in the work of the College and, in one sense, this was not wholly wrong. The work itself was very pleasing, and the ministry of it was expanding. But I was becoming aware of factors which demanded serious consideration. A journey around South East Asia in 1970 opened my eyes to the need for more practical communication of the Gospel through the available media of our day. My own contacts in various States of Australia and other countries in the world made me see the ways in which the Gospel could be preached effectively. I also saw that no matter how fine College councils are, they are naturally enough concerned with the work within the campus itself. Why not, indeed?

At the same time, I could see that, unless each College were also a movement, then the truth that it sought to communicate would be given the lie by its own static academic polity. I doubt whether there was much that was static on our own campus, or for that matter on the other campuses in Australasia, but suddenly I became alarmed. A campus could easily become a world on its own, and in its own (imagined) right. The Gospel is too dynamic to be kept within the confines of planned academia. The formats we produce must not only be functional, but *they must spring from the nature of the Gospel itself.*

The Glory on the Inside

Ideally, of course, there should be no colleges, nor other forms of para-church ministry. There should be the local churches and each with its sense of the catholic (universal) nature of the *ecclesia*. The early church did have what we today call para-church ministries. There were apostles who operated in addition to the chosen twelve. There were prophets who were itinerant, and many of the teachers seemed to travel. Interestingly enough, this is being repeated in our Australian Aboriginal churches. What all this adds up to is that I am sure that we must hang loose to structures, and be liberated from stereotypes of all forms. Whilst the early churches were strongly structured and had a form of hierarchy in elders, yet they knew they must be open to the immediate power of the Word and the Spirit. They knew their true leadership came from Christ, Lord of the Church.

It was the dimension in which Vicki lived, this hanging loose, that struck me most powerfully. I realised our sin lies in seeking some form of security in the shape of our doctrine, the patterns of our belief, the structures of our churches, the manners of our living, the modes of our worship, and the formulated morals and ethics of our practice, so that we can tie our consciences to these paradigms and parameters. To see Vicki wanting to do only the Father's will—however demanding it might prove—suddenly brought me back to what I had formerly known, namely a flexibility of living, a desire to adapt to the plan God had for His people and His creation.

I have no doubt that students and staff noticed a difference in me at that point. Whether they did or not does not much matter. A change came. I was now open to what the Spirit would say to me. Years later I realise that I had become protective of my reputation, hurt when I was attacked by those who disagreed with me, and even incensed when injustice was done. I am sure that I did not want to vindicate myself personally, but the truth which I held. In the ultimate, such attempts at vindication may well prove also to be vindication of oneself; I do not know.

The other effect that Vicki brought about was from her attitude to me. She clearly thought that I was as free as she was. In one sense I was shamed back to my former pattern of living. In another

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

I was stimulated to it. A wife who has expectation of her husband beyond his present accomplishments may lead him on to fulfil her prophetic goal. This is the kind of thing that happened to me.

If it happened to me, then I doubt not that it happened with others. Eleven years after her death the urgency of revival is no less with me, and has grown for many more. Without sentiment one may say:

She being dead yet speaketh.

Actions are not confined to the moment of their happening. If they are truth they go on making their impact and effecting their goals. This is what gives dignity to the human race, especially as it lives in the truth. Those days when Vicki lived with us and talked with her fellow students were days when I rediscovered liberation. What I had taught so often, was now so real to me. It was from those days that I was wide open to the new plans the Father had for our family.

Within six months I handed in my resignation to the College. I could not believe that I was prepared to leave the campus which for over six years had been the place of so much worthwhile teaching, action and expansion. If Vicki's witness had done nothing else I was grateful for what it had accomplished in me. Many times I have to go to the same point afresh, looking to see whether the seductive web of seeming security is not binding me again. I imagine this is the case for all of us who see the life of faith as a total matter, as a complete union with the Father and His Son through the power and enablement of the Holy Spirit.

The specific gifts which the Father gave to Vicki to sustain her became inspiration to those of us with whom she shared them. There was one time when I visited her at her home. Previous to this I had shared with her the prognosis of the doctors, namely her imminent death. She had accepted that calmly enough, and

The Glory on the Inside

doubtless her 'hanging loose' was tested. Even so, she had seemed undisturbed. Shortly afterwards she had a grace-gift in the form of a very powerful vision. She saw herself in heaven and was captured by the beauty of the scene. Now, on this occasion, when she shared the dream (although she thought it was happening and not a dream), I knew she had no fear of death, and no fear of life, either. By this time she was suffering pain, weakness, nausea, and the restrictions that illness brings. The vision was a lovely gift to her, and as she shared the experience I could see what she saw, so much so that I had a rare moment of writing a poem, the one included in this volume, and preceding this story.

About this time she felt the need of prayer. It was one of the rare occasions when Lorrie and Vicki were alone. Jack had taken Lynne and Daniel to his mother's home, and Vicki asked for prayer. Strange motions were happening within her, as the cancer made further inroads. Lorrie began praying, and quoting the words, 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you'.

Vicki then said simply and quietly, 'He's here now, Mum, in this room. I see him.' This time it had not been a vision, nor an actual sight of him, but a faith assurance that he was present, assurance greater than that which we know by physical sight.

Towards the end of March her condition began rapidly to deteriorate. At times she was so tired she could not talk to anyone. On the 26th she came from her room to talk with the family, and stumbled, falling to the floor. Later in the evening it was not possible for her to eat or drink without help from others. The next day it was quite clear that her physical state had changed for the worse. She was unable to talk at this time. Her right side was affected, and this situation remained without recovery. The family doctor came and saw immediately that she needed to be admitted to hospital—the Queen Elizabeth.

For her part Vicki could hear what was being said, but couldn't speak. The cancer had attacked the brain, and was hastening the end. The doctor had been assured that she would be granted immediate admission, although such arrangements were not always easy to make. She had previously asked for a single room, but

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

it seemed that, at the time when it was needed, this was not possible. Then a kindly patient—a gracious lady—became aware of the need, and surrendered her room to Vicki. She herself was leaving the next day, and she went to a ward for the night. This gift was a Godsend to the Randalls, and they expressed their gratitude for the kindness.

Next morning it was clearly evident that Vicki's condition had so deteriorated that having her at home and nursing her there would be virtually impossible. Lorrie struggled with this, because she had known of another friend who had been able to be at home right up until the last. Lorrie desperately wanted this for Vicki, but Laurel and I counselled her to let Vicki have the best attention possible. Lorrie walked the distance from the hospital to home—almost five kilometres—and all the time the battle was going on in her mind. She thought about Vicki and the intense pain she was suffering, and decided that things must be left as they were: Vicki needed expert attention.

It was around that time that I was due to speak at the Mount Gambier Convention. I made my last visit to see Vicki, not knowing what might happen when I was away. She had given me something which was precious and, when I went to see her, I felt the breath of God about me. She had been moved to a larger room and Jack and Lorrie visited her regularly, spending much time with her. Michael also was a patient there, having had an operation for appendicitis.

I was not the only one who, at that time, was aware of God's presence and action in the circumstances. Jack too was sensing a moving of the Holy Spirit in his person; something different from what he had previously known was happening in him and to him. He sensed strongly that many folk were praying for him, for Lorrie, and indeed for all the family. By now, Vicki was hardly able to communicate with words at all; but once, she clearly asked, 'Where have you been? I haven't seen you.'

Down at the Easter Convention I was again speaking about the love of God. On the Sunday morning, my theme was, 'The Living Ones'. Christ was called 'the living one' in the first chapter of the

The Glory on the Inside

Revelation. In Ezekiel 36 God promised that He would return the exiled Israelites to their own land—‘And you shall live . . .’ Later in the message I spoke of the Living One—Christ himself—who comes to give life, and how on that first Resurrection day he had breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’. Then I linked the coming of the Spirit with the vision of the valley of dry bones described in Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven. I pointed out that they stood up as a great army, and this was what had happened at Pentecost in fulfilment of the prophecy. I can remember that sense of excitement in talking about reality. I could see how it related to Vicki. Whilst she was close to death, she was very much alive, and not going to die. I felt I should tell them about her and her assurance that somehow her own death was linked with the coming of life to our land.

Many of them at ‘the Mount’ talked to me about Vicki because they remembered her. Her witness was, in one sense, very homely, and in another quite awesome. I was not talking about some person whom they had not known, but one who was real to them. I was quite gripped by all that was happening and being revealed in my own life, and so was trying to share the experience of Jesus’ words, ‘Receive the Holy Breath’. In one sense this was a repeat of the creation when God formed man of the dust of the earth and ‘breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living being’.

That afternoon I talked on ‘The Love of God and the Love of Man’. There is no great point here in reproducing that address, but at about that time Vicki and her family were sharing together. Suddenly she said, ‘Something is happening, but I am not quite sure what it is. Is this the time?’ The family prayed with her and read from the Psalms, especially passages which spoke of the greatness and faithfulness of the Lord. Whatever He had for them could only be good: this is how they talked and thought and prayed. Even at that moment she might leave them, but that was not His plan. Something more was to happen.

It is a fact that we are often gripped by what people do in their days and hours before death. Each movement, gesture or utterance seems to be filled with significance. The last few days for Vicki

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

were a time of utter dependence upon her family. Sometimes she could not articulate, and when she wanted water would have to point to it. Jack would help her to drink. He knew even better than the nurses how to do this. They were tender enough not to want things to go wrong for her when she drank, and Jack's fatherhood seemed to encourage her. He would lift her with his strong arm, and support her as needed. The staff were most attentive, kind and helpful. Somehow Vicki's illness seemed special to many of them.

On Monday morning, Jack felt he should pray for her and she agreed, nodding. He laid hands lightly upon her head and prayed in his fatherly way. In the early hours of the next morning she had another experience of the presence of the Lord. Vicki told Lorrie during the day that the Lord had come to her, and that he was coming for her soon. She spoke then from Habakkuk 2, verses one and two. The passage was not new to Vicki and Lorrie, for they had shared it before. She now spoke in a weak voice and said that the Lord wanted them *to pray on in faith*. What He had promised He would do. She knew she was speaking the truth. Did she know that her communication was truly prophetic? I think so. So often she had assured me of the same thing.

Years later, Lorrie opened Vicki's Bible to look at that same chapter. She noticed the way in which certain words were underlined:

*Write the vision . . . If it seem slow wait for it . . .
the righteous shall live by his faith.*

Undoubtedly these words meant a lot to Vicki, both for herself, and for the visitation of God to the church.

I can remember how Vicki prepared for her going. Whilst she was with us at Victor Harbor she gave away certain of her things. In fact I doubt whether there was anything left to give. Jack's later comment was, 'Vicki had her bags packed; she was ready to go'. When she gave them away she said, 'I don't need these now'. She gave her father her large wide-margin Bible in its splendid

The Glory on the Inside

folder cover. At one time she was with our daughter Elizabeth, standing outside the home, looking up at some trees. She said, 'I'll miss all this'. To her it was beautiful. With a smile she said, 'I'll miss eating pears off a tree'. She told Carol, our eldest daughter, that she was sad that the students wanted some kind of faith-healing, and couldn't understand about knowing and accepting the will of God. She herself believed that He healed, but she also knew that such healing was not given in every case, and she sensed that she was being called home. Giving things to her friends was a way of saying 'Good-bye!' with love. She methodically gave away her possessions to her fellow students, and they were grateful. Even more, they coveted her wisdom, and deeply appreciated her discernment. For a woman of twenty-two years she was certainly remarkable. The key was, of course, that she had 'become as a little child'. She was a true daughter of the Kingdom, and as such drew upon the wisdom of the Father-King, and the Elder Brother.

On Tuesday the 4th of April, the nursing sister happened to say to Jack and Lorrie, 'You could bring all the family tonight, if you like. That would be in order.' This rather surprised them, as they had thought it would be too tiring for Vicki. By this time Vicki was painfully thin. Somehow we had become used to seeing her like this, but it was, nevertheless, painful. Now the family looked down at her—Jack, Lorrie, Anne, Michael, Lynne and Daniel. Robert and his family were still in Darwin. As they gathered around the bed, Vicki was so glad to see them all. Each had a short talk with her. In retrospect, the whole event can be seen as little less than remarkable. It was the last talk any would have with her. After a time Vicki indicated apologetically that she could not prolong the fellowship. Her head ached badly, but she was gentle in her quiet dismissal.

When she spoke with Jack, he said, 'See you in the morning!' There was a bit of a lilt to his voice. She smiled but made no further response. Because he wanted a response, he said again, 'See you in the morning!' When again she only smiled, Jack changed

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

his mind. By this time they knew each other's minds. Vicki was honest and would only allow the truth. He looked at her and said gently, 'See you in glory!'

She nodded at her dad, and said, 'That's better'. At that they left her, trailing from the room.

The next day—Wednesday—a call came through from the hospital with the news that Vicki was unconscious. Jack stayed home from work, and with Lorrie he went to the hospital. The two parents spent the morning with her, sometimes watching, sometimes praying, and wondering whether the Lord might—even at this late stage—do some gentle miracle. Long ago they had relinquished Vicki to Him, if indeed they had ever thought of withholding her for themselves. The dimensions in which relationships had been carried on over those months were strange ones, and unusual in character. Those who live with and attend the terminally ill know that it is a world closed off from the careless thinker, but is a world which is fraught with deep mystery for those whose loved one is in the valley of the shadow of death.

In Vicki's case she was the strong one of us all, strengthening us as she communicated the unbelievable joy of God, insisting quietly but firmly on His goodness. Illness presented no problem to her. Somehow she knew the Father incorporated such things into His plan, using them in His perfect way. Not even the deepest pain made her stumble. She knew Paul's insight that pain shapes and prepares us for glory, not as a price paid but as a way prescribed—the way of love. Many of us received impressions that were for the most part unconscious. They were formed within us, designed to stay with us and prepared us for other days of suffering.

Jack and Lorrie knew that in His sovereign way the Father might—at this very last moment—do a special miracle. Objectively nothing of that sort happened. As they reached out to her unconscious self, and as she moaned in pain about midday—though still unconscious—they shared with her in the faith and love that was their ministry. Then, at one o'clock on that last afternoon she ceased to breathe. They both knew with certainty that her pain had ceased and that joy had come in the morning, the new

The Glory on the Inside

morning as she entered into the joy of her Lord. The Scripture, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master’, was accompanied by another, ‘The King will say . . . “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”’ (Matthew 25:23, 34).

Jack and Lorrie left the hospital, not hurt, not bewildered, not crushed, but filled with a special sense of the Father’s love and His sustaining grace.

Well over a decade has passed but the event is, of course, vivid in the minds of her parents and family. It is best then to give their words and their impressions as they have set them down:

We rejoiced in the knowledge of the great goodness of the Father, and the riches of His grace towards us as a family. He had visited us and shown us clearly His love, grace and truth in the outworking of His plan in our Vicki’s life. We returned to our home in the deep joy and peace of knowing she was *alive in Christ forever*. Later Geoff came to our home, having first been to the hospital. It was a time of the great expression of the love of the Father in our lives together. Jack and I had really been prepared for this because in our studies on Monday nights, we—together with so many others—had been hearing the Word of the grace of God in the book of Romans. We knew that we had seen her ‘death’ but she, already being in eternal life here, had simply moved to eternal life in glory. When our children came home we could say ‘Vicki has gone home now. Isn’t that wonderful!’ Because of the absolute truth of our words they knew all was well. Lynne and Daniel could know by the Father’s great grace that Dad and Mum were sure of what they were saying. Children know these things and, though not fully understanding, are at peace.

I had been away at Mount Gambier, and had not returned until the Tuesday, when I had to resume lectures. The phone call on the Wednesday brought me hurrying down after lectures, too late to see Vicki alive, but not too late to see her body in death. Her thin face was still and quiet, but very gentle. Gratitude for her life and

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

witness swept over me, as I thanked the Father for her. The hospital sister left me alone in the room. A human body is a sacred thing, rightly understood, but Vicki was not there, not anyway in her wholeness. I knew that one day this seed of a body, sown into the soil of creation, would rise in glory. At the same time I knew she was already in glory. The mystery one knows deeply down in oneself is impossible to articulate.

When I arrived at the Randall home, Jack and Lorrie were standing at the back gate. They seemed so serene and tranquil that it came to me as a bit of a shock. I ought to have known that the past months had not only prepared them, but that they had both grown in spiritual stature. I had always admired Jack, knowing him to be a quiet man who had little time for emotional demonstrations, but the months had melted him in many ways and his own feelings showed much more. That day as we prayed together and talked over Vicki's life, there was a great deal of joy and triumph. We had that wonderful sense of supportive grace as though the Lord were so near. The elements which seem to hold most of us to the physical world and its promise of pleasure and fulfilment seemed to be powerless. It is not fanciful to speak of 'a sense of the heavenlies'. That surely was with us.

Jack and Lorrie and their children were fully prepared for Vicki's funeral service; although Robert and his family were in Darwin, they had kept in close touch. The death of our own daughter, Ruth, in an accident two and a half years later, helps me to understand the feelings of parents as they approach the funeral and burial of their own child. Lorrie had, of course, been under great stress, and many a time the tears had streamed down her face, especially after her visits to the hospital. Jack's approach had been different. His preparation for this day went back to October 12 1970, when the diagnosis of malignant cancer had come through to him and Lorrie. His much marked Bible was further marked that day as he underlined Philippians 3:10 (AV):

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

The Glory on the Inside

In the margin he had written at that time: ‘The secret of God’s fullest blessing’.

On Thursday the 6th, the day following Vicki’s death, I spoke on her passing at our College chapel service.² It is wonderful to have the recorded tape of that event. The service itself was joyful. In the background are the chortlings and songs of the magpies. They almost always came to chapel services. Not only did they sing in the old pines and the young eucalypts, but they would come into the chapel itself, and make themselves known. The day itself was glorious, and Vicki’s transition to glory was not a new thought. Some had hoped that even at the last there might be a staying miracle, but all knew she had gone to be with Christ and the Father, and so they rejoiced. Our theme for the chapel was ‘The Great Inheritance’, and our thoughts centred around 1 Peter 1:3–5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

At that service I spoke on the new birth, and the new hope, both of which are based on the fact and quality of Christ’s resurrection. I contrasted the present possession of these future treasures with the present things which men count as their treasures but which will ultimately fade. Vicki had come to a place where none of the latter were dear to her. This had happened years before, so that when she approached the end of life on earth she felt no sense of loss, but rather a sense of great gain, an anticipation of what had been laid up for her.

Because we knew this to be true of Vicki, I am sure many of us were challenged to face our own relationship with the world about us. Words of exhortation which on most occasions seem

² See the Appendix, pp. 118–122, for the transcript of this sermon.

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

commonplace enough, suddenly—on the occasion of death—take on a new meaning and significance. That morning everyone was gripped by Vicki’s leaving them, and so it seemed that the worship and the Word were filled with freshness and power.

The last heading in the address notes was, ‘This Child of God—Vicki’, and the observations under it were:

She had the experience of new birth;

she had a high view of God’s will in obedience (cf. her broken engagement);

she pressed on to do His will;

she wanted her life to be fruitful;

she longed for the unity of God’s people (so she listened to the studies on Ephesians);

she longed not to wish to go more than to stay if it were His will;

she was strong and firm in all these things, to the end;

she discovered a new family relationship.

It is interesting to remember that at one corporate ‘Share and Prayer’ time she stood up and talked about her past broken engagement, saying, ‘The Lord just wants me to be His daughter for a while’. The new relationship with the Father had brought her into a wider understanding of the whole family of God, no less her own intimate family.

The next day was Vicki’s valedictory service. In fact the Tuesday evening had been that because the family had—in a sense—farewelled her. Jack had said, ‘See you in glory!’ and Vicki had nodded. Now it was her friends and acquaintances, and others who

The Glory on the Inside

had been affected by her, who came to share their love and respect, and to honour the physical fragment which remained of her.

Her home church—the Baptist church at Lockleys—was where the service was held. The building could not hold all the worshippers. They had come from many places. Of course the College was there, staff and students. From the beginning the service was reverent, vibrant and wholly joyful. Some, in fact, were shocked at the evident joy. They had expected grief and reverent mourning, and it seemed not to be this way. So joyful was it that later, when referring to the service, one student unconsciously said, ‘At Vicki’s wedding . . .’ It seemed just like that, a beautiful union of a gentle person with her Bridegroom. The joy was not induced, or worked up. It grew from a natural gratitude for the life and witness of the Father’s child. Whilst she was as much and as ordinary a human being as any one of us, she was also a special spirit, and we recognised this.

There is no need here to go into detail about the service.³ Simply to say that it opened with the regular burial service Scriptures followed by some readings including Psalm 116, after which the classical reading came from 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen. The hymns had been chosen by Vicki, the first being, ‘To God be the Glory’. After that I spoke on ‘She Kept the Faith’. Psalm 116:10 says, ‘I kept my faith, even when I said, “I am greatly afflicted”’. Verse fifteen adds, ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints’.

It was necessary to let Vicki’s testimony penetrate as far as possible into the hearts of the listeners. Some of us knew it very well; others did not. We talked about her, mentioning some of the things we have described in this story. However, it was the warm spirit of love and gratitude that gripped so many. Later, after the service, a friend of the family who was not a Christian said, ‘You’ve really got something there!’ The peace, love and joy reminded me of a triumphant funeral we had celebrated in Pakistan

³ See the Appendix, pp. 123–128, for the transcript of Vicki’s valedictory service.

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

and which stunned the watching and puzzled Moslems. They saw no great hope in death. We knew total hope.

Vicki's Aunt Bonnie was scandalised by the occasion. She said, 'This is the most dreadful funeral I have ever been to in my life'. Bonnie's husband was Vicki's uncle and Lorrie's brother, Daniel. He too had gone forward at the Graham Crusade, but had drifted a long way from the faith. The service did not seem to affect him much, but later proved to be just one link in a long chain of events that brought him into a dynamic renewal within the faith. Bonnie's comments on Vicki are included in this volume, and make thrilling—and amusing—reading.

As the service ended we sang 'The Lord's My Shepherd' to the tune 'Crimond'.

No doubt there was grief in all our hearts, the grief that is the obverse side of love. We loved Vicki and did not want to see her go, but we took courage from her own attitude and knew it to be the best that the Father had planned.

The brief service at the crematorium was equally triumphant. At the end, after the committal, the student body rose and sang unforgettably, 'The King of Love My Shepherd Is'. As we sang it I had a glorious vision of Vicki in heaven. All I could see was rich green and rolling pastures, soft and gentle to the touch, and wonderfully cool. Vicki was dressed in a white flowing dress and she was running, laughing and crying with joy. She stooped and let her hands move through the rippling grass, and finally she flung herself into it. I could see that she was strong and healthy, and that radiance flowed from her. It was a simple kind of glory, and the impression was that she was now at home, revelling in the love of the Father, and rejoicing in her new-found health.

The words of the hymn were, of course, just a different version of the same twenty-third Psalm which we had sung in the church. Also we had sung this song at the College chapel service, in competition with the magpies! Many times afterwards we have used this song, and Jack and I have exchanged glances as we have sung it. We also chose the tune of this hymn for our daughter Ruth's burial service, and I was able to write a new song to fit it.

The Glory on the Inside

The service was over. Folk mingled and flowed together. Many shared their deepest thoughts about Vicki, or remembered things she had said and done. Recently, in preparing this book, I have rung different ones, and they have had instant recall of Vicki. They have said, without hesitation, such things as, ‘She was a sweet girl’; ‘She was a radiant person—she just glowed’; ‘She was gentle’; ‘Vicki was quiet and deep’. More time was needed to recall details of incidents and acts, but the memory of her was vivid and immediate.

The chapel service at the College had made a strong impact. The experiences we have described had brought a new measure of spiritual freshness to us all. The truth of God’s grace and love had been lived in our midst, and it is impossible to gauge the lasting effects of such a witness. In a practical way of love the students gathered together a love-gift of money to help towards the funeral expenses, and this deeply affected the Randall family. I know too that a large number of the students wrote letters expressing their love, and telling of the impact of Vicki upon their lives. The comments which are included in this volume indicate to some degree what influence Vicki’s life had upon us.

Lorrie, for some months prior to Vicki’s death, had been reading William Romaine’s classic on faith, *The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith*. Romaine’s book has been reprinted in later years, but the copy I owned had come to me in quite a remarkable way and I treasured it. I knew that the Randalls would enjoy it and lent it to them. Romaine was an evangelical clergyman in the eighteenth century who, as Bishop J. C. Ryle comments, ‘. . . stood alone, with almost no backers, supporters or fellow-labourers. He stood in the same place, constantly preaching to the same hearers, and not able like Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw and other itinerant brethren, to preach old sermons. He stood there witnessing to truths which were most unpopular, and brought down upon him opposition, persecution and scorn . . .’ Romaine’s book reads well, even today. Lorrie comments that in his book Romaine says that where we see the action of true obedience and faith in those around us, then we see the action of God’s grace. She adds, ‘His grace is

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

powerful and always coming to us in His Son. In Vicki's life we see—as her parents—a very dear girl who lived fully those last few years in grace and truth. It was the trial of faith for her, as it is for all who trust in Him.'

The Times that Follow

It would be labouring our story to go on adulating Vicki, who saw herself as an ordinary person, but who also knew that to be the daughter of the Father was a rich vocation. What mattered to her was the truth, and she saw that truth to be very simple, namely the active love and grace of God. Sensationalised biographies speak of amazing fruits of a person's life and death. Behind this kind of description is often an attempt to justify God for the painful sickness which happened. At the chapel service I said that 'Christ taught, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit", and the fruitage of that corn of wheat is God's business and not ours. Nor does God have to do that in order to justify His actions. He has done what is right, and we have had the privilege of seeing, and sharing in that experience, and I think that most of us who have looked very closely—and sought to see through the eyes of faith—have seen that it is a good thing to be with the Father when it is His time for us to be with Him.'

In other words, we must not attempt to justify God. His plan is perfect for all His ways are perfect, but they are perfect only to the eyes of faith. Human sight sees ugly flaws in His plans, and blames Him for the pain and suffering it sees in the world. A little unbiased thinking would surely arrive at the conclusion that most pain and suffering is caused by man himself, but in saying even this we may be trying to justify God. He needs no such justification. If Vicki's life had borne little fruit, her translation to the Father would still be magnificent and a matter of glory.

As it is, we know her life has made a deep impact. The indelible impression made upon College students, Vicki's family and other

The Glory on the Inside

friends remains—even if unconsciously—today. We need not labour that, either. For me it was a renewal into a faith-relationship with the Father and His Son, and fresh life of truth in the Holy Spirit. It constituted one of those nudgings of God which caused me to move out from the College into a ministry to which I was more suited. Whilst I am not ashamed to call myself a theologian—for I am—yet I think theology is more a matter for the street and for the ruck of life than for the study, and even the College campus. I cheerfully acknowledge the value of study and campus, but I also believe that in the rough and tumble of life our theology has the necessary element of practical living and functional operation. Those who are of academic bent need to be recalled—time and again—to the reality of the truth. Abstract thinking and reasoning can build an unreal world, and—for that matter—a deceptive one. Truth works itself out in the nitty-gritty of unvarnished human living.

It would be impossible to assess the continuing impact of Vicki's faith on the Randall family. They are not the kind of people who indulge in this sort of research. It is simply a fact that after her death a small group of folk—some who were Vicki's friends, some nurses from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and some who had been caught in the slip-stream of Vicki's witness—began to meet to share the truth of the Gospel and more fully relate to the True One. It was not an unhealthy esoteric group, huddled together over a memory, or sharing a limited aspect of the truth. The group listened to many of the tapes which we were producing in our new recording studio at College. All chapel services and lectures were fed into the recording room, and so what the students were hearing became common property for many. In fellowship and discussion a ministry happened which prepared the participants for the years ahead. Lorrie mentions one young woman who had been deeply affected by Vicki's life and witness, who is now a mother of growing children, and whose husband is a man of God. In fact I can remember sharing in their home one night in Whyalla where we

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

were having a mission. The home exploded with laughter as we shared stories with the children. One of the teenage daughters comes regularly to Bible studies which I conduct. This of course is an isolated example of the fruit of that sharing.

Lorrie Randall tells of a latter effect of Vicki's life:

In March 1976 Jack's mother was in hospital. The cause of her illness was cancer. She was in much suffering. She had been close to all her grandchildren and had watched as Vicki's life unfolded. One day I talked with her concerning forgiveness and prayed for her. About a week later and almost at the time of her going blind she spoke to Jack and Jean of having received that word by faith. She was 85 years on the 12th March that year. When Jack went to see her she used to say to him after talking a while, 'Well, I'm ready for my lesson now'. He used to encourage her in small portions of Scriptures as she could manage. She looked for him to do that . . . The Reverend Ben Jones, from Semaphore—Largs C. of E., came to bring communion to her. He knew what had happened for her. One evening she was able to listen as we played from the ABI Chapel tape recorded on the 6th April 1972, 'The King of Love My Shepherd Is'. That was a great joy to her. She went home to the Father on the 7th April 1976.

In writing this story of Vicki I have had to contact a number of people. One of the most valuable of these contacts has been the one with Daniel Kelly—Lorrie's brother, Bonnie's husband and Vicki's uncle. He was honest enough to say that Vicki's life and death had not consciously affected him, although he recognised that it must have made its own impact. The story he tells is quite fascinating, but what I record here is only a paraphrase as I attempt to communicate the gist of his statements:

As I see it, Vicki was one part of a whole linkage of persons, events, and circumstances which has brought me back to the Father, and taken me on in the life of the Christian family. I have always known the truth. There was a group of us in those early days who went to the Graham Crusade, were affected, went forward, and then sought to go on in the Christian life.

The Glory on the Inside

I was part of the Randall family. Vicki was much younger than I, but she seemed to be a sister, and one didn't think about ages. When we shared the experience of conversion it all seemed natural. As I grew into later teenage, then I also began to grow as a person. I decided—almost unconsciously at one point—that I wanted to live life out to its fullest. I began to read psychology, especially the functional psychology of salesmanship, and so learned how to increase sales and success. One of my friends has become a millionaire through these methods. I dropped faith-thinking for success endeavour, and seemed to do pretty well. I also went downhill morally and ethically. It was inevitable, but, strangely enough, all the time I could tell others—even when drunk—what the truth was.

From time to time, friends and companions would discuss life, and few saw much in it beyond the current materialism. Some of them were despairing or cynical, but I could give them a good view of the Gospel. I knew the truth of it, even if I wasn't living by it, and—strange as it may seem—I still thought of myself as a Christian. I knew myself to be rebellious, angry, and away from God; yet I knew the truth to be the truth.

Lorrie was my older sister, and you can't alter that kind of relationship. So she exercised the role of an older sister. She would lend me books—mainly your books—and pass on cassettes for me to hear. In many ways I resented this, but also recognised that she was just being a sister, and what I wanted was to know the fact and life of the family. I wanted the family to be there, even though I did not want to be harassed back into Christian living. I always wanted the family to be truly the family. I knew enough of the principle of God to know that He was Father and His people were the true family. But then I wanted what I called 'my freedom'. I had exchanged the form of truth for new truth, the truth of psychology, the truth of assessable—and usable—human behaviour. The names of Freud and Jung and others were more relevant than those of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and even Jesus Christ. Even so, I knew this wasn't the truth, but then I didn't want the truth which demanded obedience and faith.

Where does Vicki come into all this? Well, hardly anywhere, and yet everywhere. No more than any other, but as important as any other. You see, I see the unity of all things, the whole thing that God is about. It is like a jar or bottle of beans. It is not a jar of beans until the last one is dropped in. Then it is a jar of beans. So without Vicki that

Vicki—the Gentle Teacher

jar of beans is incomplete, not a true jar. With her it is. She was as necessary—in my case and in any case—to complete the whole thing. So she had her impact on me and on others, just as another would. That makes her both one of many and yet unique. That is how I see it.

I could see it also. No human being—and especially no child of God—should be either underrated or overrated but just ‘rated’!

Daniel went on:

I read the books and listened to the cassettes and they simply confirmed what I knew. In fact it was uncanny the way they did it. I knew I could not go on resisting reality, and that what I lived in was not reality. The night I went to that church at Klemzig where you were preaching I sighed, abandoned myself with joy and peace, and said, ‘It is good to be home, Dad!’

I remembered the series I had preached on ‘Fatherhood and Family’.

‘The Randalls were always true family’, Daniel said, ‘and as far back as I can remember. So then Vicki was part of that family, and helped to make it so, as well as drawing on it herself. Although the funeral service seemed to leave me untouched, and made Bonnie mad, it did have its positive impact. Vicki had her impact; but on the “beans in the jar” principle. That’s the way I see it.’

After a time Daniel said, ‘Things are really happening in our church. We are seeing the reality of God. It is not just a repetition of conventional belief, conventional worship. It is reality. It is the truth. It is action. God is alive. The Father is near.’

Looking at Daniel I thought, ‘Well, that was what Vicki was about, and what all His children are about. None is more important than another; nor less. It is just that we should all be living in the truth, walking by faith, and depending upon grace. After all, this is obedience and the true life.’

I am sure Daniel agrees with this, and Bonnie also, to say nothing of Jack and Lorrie and a host of others, countless numbers,

The Glory on the Inside

in fact, who have never heard of Vicki, the radiant young woman of twenty-two years who 'being dead yet speaketh'. In fact, she is not dead, not even sleeping. She is 'with Christ which is very much better':

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours; for their deeds follow them!' (Revelation 14:13).

So she is there, with Him, and all her wonderful deeds; wonderful, yes, but also very simple.

A Slim Essay on Death

Today we have developed a psychology of death, and even a theology of demise. I mean we have rationalised how a person approaches death, and have researched the steps that dying people often take—in their minds, in their spirits, in their wills. It is not on those that I particularly wish to write. Those who hold these keys to understanding death will be able to analyse Vicki's attitude and assess her by them.

I was the one who had to tell her that she was dying. I also had the opportunity to sit and talk of the matters of life and death. A principal and students develop a theological understanding of death, but they usually develop it in the study and the lecture room. My understanding of death has developed by revelation and experience. By 'revelation', I mean that understanding came to me from the Scriptures which, as I understand them, tell me what men and women cannot reveal to me. For example, they tell me that all mankind, from the cradle to the grave, is afraid of death. To be honest I do not see this empirically by studying human beings. I know it to be true, and knowing this helps me to understand humanity in its fear of death.

By 'experience' I mean my own experience of death, coupled with seeing people die in war, in prisoner-of-war camps, in the course of my pastoral work, and in my own family. I have myself been a number of times on what we call 'the edge of death'. Of course I was not, because I lived on, but then I *seemed* to be about to die. All things considered, I think I know a little of death.

The Glory on the Inside

Of death and dying I want to say this: ‘The person who believes in the Saviour of the world never dies’. I base this claim on Jesus’ words:

I am the resurrection and the life;
he who believes in me, though he die,
yet shall he live, and whoever lives
and believes in me, *shall never die* (John 11:25–26).

Paul’s classic chapter on death and resurrection (the fifteenth of 1 Corinthians) spells out the promise of Christ in practical terms. What Jesus meant was that although watchers of a person would see what they called that one’s death, yet *the person himself (herself) would never see death*. It is a thrilling thought, that death—so called—is in fact the transition point to further life, or to a richer experience of life already lived in Christ. The *quality* of eternal life cannot change. Eternal life is not merely continuity of life, but it is *the very life of God imparted to human beings*. It is eternal in the sense that it is without ‘beginning’ and without ‘end’, for that is how God is, but for us there is a beginning of experiencing it, that is, the first moment of faith. From that point, it flows on eternally. At what we call the point of death *the quality* does not change, but *the modes* of living it do. And that change is the most thrilling thing of all.

It means that the frailty of the body ceases. The body ceases to be ‘this body of our humiliation’ and becomes ‘the body of glory’. By ‘body of humiliation’, we mean a body subject to sin’s pressures, the endless round of temptations, and the sad use to which we put it in the service of evil. The body itself, being created by God, is good and not evil. The ‘body of glory’ does not mean an ethereal mass of light and radiance. But the human body sown in physical death to the earth (whether as ultimate dust, ashes, or exploded into gases) now being renewed by the Holy Spirit into resurrection reality. Christ’s risen body was substantial—‘does a spirit have flesh and bones?’—and he ate and drank with his followers. We do not ponder whether we will eat and drink in the

A Slim Essay on Death

way we know these actions here. We simply know that temptation will be a thing of the past. What is called ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’, that is, our glorification and the non-possibility of corruption, whether physical, moral or spiritual, will be our continuing experience and state.

What really outshines the rest is the fact that we will have eternal vocation. Having been glorified we will be ‘a kingdom of priests’, which must mean that we will serve God and all His creation. This is what He has fitted us for.

These were the things I could—and did—share with Vicki. They were the things she accepted in calm faith. I never saw in her any anger about death, or non-accepting, or any form of resignation—whether in concealed anger or human despair. I saw her joyfully accept what was coming *as a gift*, and not as an imposition for which she would be compensated. The secret of that glad acceptance was her belief that God is good, God is loving—even when appearances seem to indicate otherwise. She was untroubled by death.

Less than three years later a daughter of ours—Ruth Pauline—was killed in a car accident. It was our most intimate link with death. In the hours after her death two verses flashed into my mind:

The Prince of life has come to us,
To show his heart so tender,
He gathers her within his arms—
Her shield and her defender.

He gathers her within his love—
His Cross has told love’s story—
And takes her to the home prepared
To know the Father’s glory.

I could see the *personal* love of God in the hour of death.

What my wife and children experienced then, as have countless numbers of people, was a special outpouring of the grace of God. Every day the human race receives grace in one form or another,

The Glory on the Inside

but there are times when grace seems to come in a special way and keeps us buoyant in the midst of special burdens and pressures. Death is one of these special times. The Randalls—especially Jack and Lorrie—were sustained in peace and joy by that grace.

After a time the flow of grace seems to recede. It is time to come to terms with the life in which we live. Some might call it ‘coming down to earth’, but I think it is just accepting living, without demanding special grace. The special grace, whilst it is with us, is healing, and there comes a point when we are healed, when it is not really needed. I know the Randalls felt that grace and profited by it. So did we as a family.

I appeal then, in the light of Vicki’s story, to those who live life in fear of death, to realise that there is no death, at least not for a believer. Paul has said that the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin lies in the law, that is, in human guilt which comes from transgressing the law. On the Cross Jesus withdrew that sting from us by taking its venom into himself and destroying it. There is thus no condemnation to those who are in Christ. As John puts it:

... perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love (1 John 4:18).

With no desire to be repetitive, let me say again that Vicki, as the gentle teacher, taught us that death brings no fear, and that in life, whether it is lived here in this world’s everyday, or lived beyond where there is intimacy with Christ, there is no true death, no alien thing to be feared.

To be free from the fear of death is to live life, to use it wisely, usefully and purposefully, and to live it with great joy and serenity.

Death Comes So Gently

Death comes so gently.
I hear the quiet footfalls,
Not light pattering—as though inconsequential,
Nor heavy padding as foreboding,
But gracious unintruding suggestion
Of one coming purposefully.

Often when long shades have fallen
Over the obsessive busyness
And the compulsive accomplishing
I have paused in the sudden quietness
Wondering why I am visited
By this soft stranger.

Never in these visitations
Has there been fear.
Nor has the bland confronted me
As though of no point (blank guilelessness),
But a clement spirit has met me
And grown into me as a dear friend
Accepts the welcome but does not invade.

At that moment I wonder concerning life.
The harsh dryness fades, the gentle
Lines of a new comprehension
Grip me within. Life's brilliance
Softens to mild and lenient colours:
The whole ameliorates. Not wistful,
Not sorrowed in sudden bursts
Of plaintive regrets, but assured
It was all as it was to be.

The Glory on the Inside

There is no need for sighing,
Nor last petulant passionate whimsy
For the real has come. This substantial
Is not now insubstantial, the reality
Has not become shadows. Life and death alike
Are the true real, the authentic moments
Portending the useful eternity.

The gentle footfalls have ceased
Receding into the misted distance,
Quietly passing over the plains
And the blue ranges, not retreating
But withdrawing. My spirit sighs
Not with relief, nor yet impatience.
Tired though it be it has received
The same mild life, the gentle-hearted,
The tractable and docile serenity
Of the new life.

Come then again this receding death,
I am quietly prepared, not anticipating
And not dreading. Where stingless death approaches
So does serenity, not as anaesthesia
Or needed sedating, but as quiet assurance.
Death is not death, but God
Coming for His own, His Father's arms
Reaching to His beloved. His quietude
Surrounds where fear might invade
And Love gently claims
That which was always His.

APPENDIX:

*Responses to Vicki's
Life and Witness*

Chapel Service at the College,

6th April 1972

‘Turn to the first epistle of Peter, chapter one, and we’ll read from verse three’:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.’

‘Peter has a great thing in his heart and his mind when he bursts into this doxology, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” And then he gives us the reason for his great joy. He says, “By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope”.

‘I suppose these words come home much more meaningfully and more powerfully to us this morning, when we consider that great act of new birth which takes place in one who is dead in trespasses and sins, and who is lost in darkness, and who is without hope in the world. Out of that great source of His very nature God,

Appendix

in His great mercy, His great love wherewith He loved us, when we were dead, has quickened us together with Him. And so we've gone through the amazing experience of the new birth, and that in itself is tremendous, as we read in 1 John 4:9, "Herein is the love of God manifested, that he sent his Son into the world that we might live through him".

'So, without hope, without Christ, without any future, we have gone through this amazing experience of new birth which transforms a person, and makes him or her into a new creation. And that were enough for us to burst into the same doxology once we were aware of the great power that needed to operate in order to bring it to pass. But the experience of it to us is so wonderful that we do, ourselves, burst into that doxology. And yet, having seen that great mercy, we haven't exhausted it in the experience of the new birth, but we've been born anew to a living hope.

'That's what I want to talk about this morning. One of the things that impressed me yesterday—I don't know that it was unexpected anyway—was that, when I went to the Randalls' home, her father and mother were standing there before the car drew up outside, their faces absolutely radiant; and really radiant, no pretended smile, no stoical insistence, but a very real and living experience of Christ through the whole situation. And one of the things which Mr Randall said was, "Well, Vicki had her bags already packed. She was ready to go." That's a fact—Vicki had given away things to different people, and she had only one thought in mind. She did say to me some weeks ago: "What I want to be sure of is that I don't want to go more than He wants me to stay". And I thought that was a very wonderful way to approach the whole thing. "If the Lord wants me to stay, I'll stay." It reminds us, of course, of Paul—"I'm in a strait betwixt two". But she wasn't in any strait, she was just wanting to do what the Lord wanted her to do.

'One night her father said to her, "Well, Vicki, we'll see you in the morning". And she just looked at him and didn't say anything. And he said it again, repeated it more loudly, then the third time. Then he said, "Well, if we don't see you in the morning, we'll see

The Glory on the Inside

you in glory”, and she said, “That’s better”. Because she had been born anew to a living hope. And what is our hope? Well, Peter tells us here. It’s to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

‘You know, sometimes we pretend that we are anxious for that great day, when, if our hearts were sincere, we would say, “I’m much more attached to this age than I am to the coming age. My roots are down here.” For my own self I can testify that over these months I’ve had a re-awakening in my own life, a re-sorting of things, and a new or renewed sense of values. I’ve shared some of those things with you in chapels and other places. The one that has come to me is of “using this world but not over-using it”. Sitting lightly to what is here. Not because that’s just expected of us, but because we are those men and women who are gripped by the living hope. We don’t rationalise the future; we know it to be so. Of course it is hope; it is not yet seen. As Paul says in Romans 8, if it were seen it wouldn’t be hope. But we have been born anew to that. Look at verse 23 of 1 Peter 1; “You have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of God abides for ever.” We have been born of the eternal word, for God’s eternal purposes. And our beauty—and there is a beauty about humanity, and there is a beauty about His creation—but that beauty is like grass. There’s a glory, a very sweet glory about it, but it fades.

‘I was looking at Vicki yesterday and my first thoughts were, “Well, you are free now! Freer than we are.” Paul knew the great battle one has as one moves deliberately towards the consummation of the living hope, and on one occasion he cried out, “Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?” The corruption that is there. The body that is dead because of sin. So we know that in that liberation we will find something that we’ve certainly tasted, and wonderfully tasted, in this world, because [Peter] says in verse 8 [of 1 Peter 1], “. . . you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy”. Or, as

Appendix

the Greek has it, “with joy that is full of glory”. It’s the glory that is to come that’s already being tasted. That’s how you know it because you know him. We’ve been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He has become the first fruits of them that slept. “If Christ be not risen from the dead”, says Paul, “your faith is futile” [1 Corinthians 15:17]. It has no point, no object, and no foundation. But he says, “In Adam all die but in Christ shall all be made alive”.

‘So right at this moment, and of course there isn’t any “this moment” in eternity really, but if you can talk about something that corresponds to that, she is with the Lord in all her fullness, a totally redeemed person in every way, enjoying fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

‘If we weren’t used to those words, and if they didn’t come as clichés, it would be quite astounding to us to know that, at this moment, that is her experience. And she has already received her inheritance which is imperishable. There is nothing of corruption in it. It’s not possible for it to be destroyed. It’s not possible for it to corrupt; it’s eternal. And there can be no defilement of it, neither internally nor externally; nothing can come upon it to defile it, and nothing can spring out of it that will defile it. This is our constant battle day by day, isn’t it, that in the present situation things that we touch and to which we relate are destructible, and even in our own internal experience we’re ashamed of the defilement that comes to us.

‘But that inheritance, that which God has for us, cannot be defiled, and it is unfading. The word here means something like flowers that are constantly fresh; the colour never fades. Anything we have here tarnishes, dulls down. I remember going down to the local Cornhill museum, and the owner showed me some of the precious stones, or gems, that are spoken about as being in heaven. And he said, “Well, that’s what they’re like down here, but what must they be like up there!” We *taste* the reality down here, but we’ll *know* it there.

“... to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” The verb here indicates that in

The Glory on the Inside

one act, at one time, God set up that inheritance for you, and it awaits you there. And he says, “. . . you, who by God’s power are guarded . . .” And again it is an action in the past—“have been guarded”—perfect tense. So that God is going on guarding you, or garrisoning you.

‘If you go back into these months, Vicki, if she had one battle, knew only the battle of faith. She didn’t seek to be a Stoic, and face death without dread or fear. She sought, more positively, to understand what God was about in her experience. I can remember, some years ago, when she very deliberately, because she thought it was God’s will, broke off her engagement. That’s quite a thing for any person to do, but she felt it was God’s will, and she did it. And that resulted then in a real transformation of her experience with Christ. I think it’s true to say, as much as you could say about any believer, that, from that point onwards, what she knew was obedience. And that’s all God requires. There are some people whose minds are restlessly trying to rationalise her experience, as though to die . . . [in] your early twenties is tragic. As though there is something more glorious in dying at the age of fifty-three. But that’s a human way of thinking, and some people are trying desperately to see what fruit has come out of this experience, as though they would justify God in His actions by something that’s resulted. That isn’t the point at all.

‘Christ said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” And the fruitage of that corn of wheat is God’s business, not ours. Nor does God have to do that in order to justify His actions. He has done what is right, and we have had the privilege of seeing and sharing in that experience. I think for most of us who have looked very closely, and sought to see this through the eyes of faith, we have seen that it is a good thing to be with the Father, when it is His time for us to be with Him. And some of us, as I said before, have been liberated from a too close attachment to plans, and possessions, and persons, so that we might be free, just to do His will.’

*The Victory Service for
Vicki Randall,¹ 7th April 1972*

‘In Psalm 116, these wonderful words in verse 8 following:

For thou hast delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;
I walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.
I kept my faith, even when I said,
‘I am greatly afflicted’;
I said in my consternation,
‘Men are all a vain hope’.

What shall I render to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

‘I want us to think today on this lovely word in the tenth verse:
“I kept my faith”.

‘Paul, in writing towards the end of his life—perhaps some of the last words he ever wrote—said something like that: “I am already on the point of being sacrificed, the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for me the crown of

¹ The message given by the Reverend Geoffrey Bingham at the Service for the Burial of the Dead on April 7th at Lockleys Baptist Church; a service which was called by her family, fellow students and friends.

The Glory on the Inside

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me on that day but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

‘The battle . . . of faith is not a light thing in the world which knows its conflict, and in a world which seeks to take us from God when we have found Him and been found in Him by Jesus Christ. [Not everyone persists in this battle.] Paul gave a charge. He said, “This charge I give to you, Timothy my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith.”

‘But, “I have kept the faith”. What words could fit Vicki Randall more than those words? This year I have had the joy, and I say the joy, of ministering the Word at the earthly departure of two great saints of God. One was Victor Golding, a Methodist minister, a man full of years, and ripe in ministry. The other one is Vicki Randall: twenty-two years of age, but full of obedience, and ready to meet her Lord, whom she loved, and not only ready, but eager to do so. She kept the faith. How strange it is to hear so many say “What a tragedy”, whereas we say, “What a victory!” And we do not say that to cover up the situation, but to expose the situation, as it is, and to show it for what it is.

‘Each of us who are here today from the Adelaide Bible Institute have come to love Vicki Randall in her two years of fellowship with us. And she was to be one of the Senior Students this year; so highly did the staff and students think of her, that she was selected for that ministry. I always feel that it was a gracious work of the Lord to her, to show her how she was loved and respected. None of us would ever think of Vicki as being ambitious, and whilst we recognise her humility, she had an amazing dignity also . . .

‘As many of us know, something like eighteen months ago . . . it was discovered that she had cancer, and [she] was operated on. [For these months], the Lord, I believe, gave her to us, and gave her that time in which to know Him so much the better. And we all are conscious of this . . . that, for perhaps even longer than the time

Appendix

we have known her, she was one who sought to be obedient to our Lord. We don't say that lightly, we don't say that in empty praise, but this was the fact. Some of us know of one situation in her life where she took a very decisive step [out of that obedience]. It was not an easy one . . . but from that time onwards she knew a liberty, and she knew a love for the Lord, and for men and women that, I suspect, she had not known in that way hitherto.

'If we were to sum up her life [in one word, that word] would be "obedience" . . . She was one who ever demonstrated the amazing liberty and freedom of spirit which a human being may know, before God, when one is obedient to Him.

'It seems amazing that at Christmas time she was cooking on a beach mission, and now—in April—she's with the Lord. She never spared herself. I can remember last year . . . when I was very ill myself, that she insisted, although she was weak, on accompanying me across to Victoria, a long journey, because she felt I ought not to be alone. And it wasn't easy for her then; she wasn't strong.

'We have many evidences of this great love she had for the Lord and for others. But I think it is what she has *taught* us in these past months that will remain with us. Some of us, in sharing the witness of her life over this time, have said that to those who had known some of the dimensions of love in Christ, that she re-opened them for us where we had drifted from them. And for some of us who had never known them, she has opened them up.

'So easy it is to talk about sitting lightly to the things of this world, this life, but how many, confronted with certain death, would have faced what she faced [in the way she did]? She didn't face it stoically; she didn't face it with human courage—she had human courage which faltered at times—but as she rested upon Christ. Some of us know the very lovely visitation she had from the Lord, who sustained her in this great witness. And I trust today—and I know Vicki trusts today—that, out of this service of victory and service of witness to God and His glory, and for His great victory (for that is what she demonstrated, by the power of Christ indwelling her) . . . we too might be released from any undue attachment to anything other than Christ and his Father.

The Glory on the Inside

‘I don’t say that lightly today; I have a burden on my heart which I believe Vicki would have me deliver to you—that she found intense peace and joy and serenity in truly knowing her Lord and loving him beyond other things.

‘I know her father won’t mind me quoting him, when he said the other day just after she went to be with the Lord: “Well, Vicki had her bags all packed up. She was ready to go.” How lovely! Some of us know she had passed out things to people because she knew she wouldn’t need them. But she just demonstrated that sense of utter security which she had in Christ. We who belong to Christ speak of our glorious inheritance, laid up for us in heaven. We say that we do not lose heart while we look at the things which are unseen, and not at the things which are seen.

‘We listen to Paul’s words of admonition: “Using the world, but not over-using it”, and do we know, do we live as we ought to live? Are we still seduced into [believing] . . . that the things of this world—its personalities, its plans, its powers and its possessions—really do give us what Christ alone can give us? Here was one who demonstrated powerfully [the truth of what Paul meant]. And yet there was more behind it than just a mere demonstration. May I say this, in parenthesis, “No one is seeking to justify Vicki’s having gone to the Lord”. It passes, perhaps not spiritual understanding, but it passes human understanding why one . . . should go to Him young, rather than that one should go to Him old . . . A thousand years are but as a day in the Lord’s sight (who does not have human standards of time, and importance) and, whilst we recognise that a man may come to three score years and ten, or even four score years, yet what is that? It can easily end in a life that is empty and useless.

‘What Vicki would have us understand first today, I believe, is her former joy and her serenity, and now her great joy (for she is with Christ and we are not as those who mourn without hope). She has the better part, now, at this moment. So then this service is one of victorious celebration of Christ’s triumph. What she would have us know is that she could not have that serenity apart from Christ and his Cross. If Paul can cry, “O death, where is thy sting, O grave

Appendix

where is thy victory?" he can only cry it because Christ destroyed the power of death on that Cross. Because he destroyed the power of sin on that Cross, and the grave could not hold him who was mightier than death, so he has risen, triumphant, to lead his people through the valley of the shadow of death, out into the sunlight of that glorious inheritance that is ours in Christ.

'And Vicki, I know, would have me ask you today, personally, "Do you know Christ in that way?" Not, do you know *about* him in that way, but do you *know* him? Do you know him in his great saving power? Do you know him indwelling your heart and mind as Lord and Saviour? Do you know the sheer joy of the forgiveness of sins, the great cleansing power of that death to take away sin and the fear of coming death, and set you free, as he set her free? Do you know that?

'Well, if you have known the power of Christ previous to today, and if you have lapsed in that, or drifted, then let this be a time of great renewal, great joy. And if you're one who had to come to Vicki's graveside to know repentance, remember that there's great joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents. And what great joy there would be for Vicki today to know that someone here had surrendered his or her life to Christ, or come home from the far land.

'Secondly [she would have us understand that], "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit".

'As I said, we do not have to justify God's actions. He is sovereign, Lord over all. He has never made a mistake, however human minds may think He has. And He has sown this precious corn of wheat, expecting a great harvest—if I dare to say today, and I trust my word is prophetic—a harvest of revival in a land that is dry and impoverished and needy, a land wherein God's people have lost the joy of sheer unity of love.

'She listened, in the last hours, to some studies we had on the book of Ephesians, and her great longing was that we, as the people of God, should come to know that unity which we are expected to experience in Christ. There are some things . . . [relevant to this]

The Glory on the Inside

that I suppose I could disclose. One of them was this; as her mother was talking to her on the matter of revival, she said, “Well, Mum, we can have just that small part in it, can’t we?”

“So if we came today as *spectators*, God does not accept that. We are *participators* in the same victory, as she not only experienced, and not only demonstrated, but which we believe, because of her witness, will go on to great fruit. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”, and how precious this death—which is the force of life—shall prove.

““Thou dost show me the path of life, in thy presence there is fullness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” That is the great victory of our faith. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and be present with the Lord.

““She has fought the good fight, she has kept the faith, henceforth is laid up for her a crown of righteousness which the Lord shall give her on that day.”

““Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.””

Individual Responses

*An Appreciation by Bonnie Kelly,
Wife of Daniel Kelly, Vicki's Uncle*

'In 1964 my idea of a Christian was someone staid and boring, and tending to be a "religious nut". I had been brought up a Catholic and at eighteen, the year of my marriage, only wanted to know God on my terms—I believed in Him, but wanted Him to leave me alone.

'I met the Randall family through my marriage to Daniel Kelly in 1964 (he is Lorrie Randall's youngest brother); I dismissed them as being "religious", and therefore on a different wavelength and of no possible interest to me. At that time Daniel was 'wandering in the desert' (his words), but even then I sensed that there was something different about him.

'I didn't know Vicki well, though I'd probably have described her as a happy, intelligent girl—a redeeming feature in a religious family; after all, aren't Christians a mournful and dim-witted lot? On the whole, I felt uncomfortable in the Randalls' presence, and put it down to them being "off-beam". In fact I deliberately tried to bait them on occasion, by smoking my head off in their home—alas, there was no reaction!

'I saw Vicki some weeks before her death and thought how at peace she seemed for one so young facing death. But then she hadn't really lived, so perhaps she didn't really know the good life she was leaving!

'At her funeral I was absolutely appalled by the behaviour of her family and friends; in fact, I remember telling my mother that it was the most dreadful funeral I had attended. They were actually smiling and laughing (the only people showing signs of grief were aunts and uncles of Vicki). Didn't this confirm my belief that they were fanatics—definitely OFF!! I was sure that they would eventually crack up from the strain of concealing their grief.

The Glory on the Inside

‘A lot has happened since then—I was reborn in 1978 (a story in itself); and of course now I can understand the happiness that was expressed at Vicki’s death and ensuing funeral—it’s lovely to be a “nut”, too.’

A Memory, from Auntie Jean

‘On looking back, it seemed important that I visit Vicki in hospital on that particular day.

‘I remember thinking as I walked to catch the train: “Must not stay very long; lots to do at home, just a quick visit”.

‘There seemed to be a great peace around that bed as we talked. I felt that I did not want to leave, so of course stayed much longer than I had intended. Missed my train, but somehow it didn’t seem to matter.

‘As I left the hospital, my feeling was of humility and a reaching out for something—most strange for self-contained me. I know now, of course, it was the work of the Holy Spirit.

‘I’ll never forget that afternoon eleven years ago. A lasting memory, and I praise the Lord for the privilege of having known Vicki.’

Impressions by Anne—Vicki’s Younger Sister

‘When Mum came and asked me to write about Vicki, my first reaction was to say, “I don’t think I can”; but as I sit and write now after reading the manuscript, I realise that I would like to write about Vicki.

‘When Vicki left for Mt. Gambier to go into nursing, I was pleased as I thought, “At last I will be able to be the eldest daughter at home!” I always remember trying to be as good as Vicki was. Unfortunately, it was my negative way that held me back from having a close relationship with her.

‘It was after she left home that we were able to communicate so much better with each other. Vicki always included a letter for me when she wrote to Mum and Dad. It was in my letters from her that

Appendix

I was able to begin to see her as she really was, a young woman, full of love.

‘Through those early teenage years, she was able to help me with advice and we became much closer then. When I left school to go to work in an office in John Martin’s, the pressure of the “outside world” was strong and I didn’t hear and didn’t want to hear what she was saying to me.

‘I remember going down to Mt. Breckan—the Bible College—with a friend of Vicki’s, for one of those Friday night teas they used to have. I was surrounded by students and the atmosphere was a happy and joyful one. I thought to myself, “All these people have ‘something’ that I don’t have”, and I felt quite resentful of that. One student approached me and asked me what I was doing with my life, to which I answered, “Nothing in particular”. The student’s answer was, “Well, you had better do something about it”. That started me thinking, but again I turned it into resentful thoughts.

‘I visited Vicki in hospital after the first operation. Mum and Dad did not tell Michael and me the seriousness of the operation as they didn’t want us to be worried or upset. My recollection of the next year or so is rather dim concerning Vicki, as I was totally immersed in my own life, oblivious to what was going on around me even in my own family. Thoughts that come back to me clearly of Vicki are January 1972 when she was home with us, very sick. I would breeze in and out of the room, stopping only to talk briefly with her. All this time she must have been longing to talk and share with me. I guess I must have really been trying to shut it all out, hoping it would all go away and that things would be the same as they were before she was ill.

‘Coming home from work one night I saw the ambulance outside our house, and I knew that Vicki must have to go to hospital. I said to my fellow passenger (who was Vicki’s best friend at high school), that something must have happened to Vicki. I remember thinking how thin she was as they carried her out to the ambulance. The next time I saw her was in hospital the night before she “died”. I was able to talk briefly with her, all the

The Glory on the Inside

time holding her small hand in mine. She told me not to be upset but to smile and be happy.

‘I don’t have any outstanding memories of Vicki’s service, only that Mrs Bingham was so happy as she was looking after Michael and myself and the two little ones. She was so happy and I wondered how she could be.

‘In 1973 I was married and after our second boy was born and he was about five months old, I became ill with a severe case of eczema on my hands. It made it very difficult to look after the children, as I was unable to put my hands into water. One day Mum and Dad came down to Yankalilla to visit, and as we were talking together I asked Mum to pray with me to receive God’s forgiveness. As I look back now it seems hard to me that I had to experience both mental and physical hardships before finally yielding to my Heavenly Father, who now I see loves me so much.

‘Romans 3:24, “. . . being justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ . . .” His peace is with me and in me now by grace, and I see things in a different way.’

Extracts from Letters Written to Jack and Lorrie Randall in 1972

- ‘God has challenged me in recent months through your acceptance of God’s will and through Vicki’s triumphant witness. I praise God for this fresh glimpse that in Christ, death has lost its sting’ (ABI student).
- ‘Her fellowship was valued by us all’ (Bublacowie Camp Committee).
- From Whyalla: ‘The very morning of the day Vicki died I was really interceding for her at the throne of grace, with a burden from the Lord to not let her suffer any more than she could take in His strength’ (ABI student).
- ‘We shall certainly never forget Vicki and her love for her Lord.’

Appendix

- ‘Vicki was an example to us all in her strength of faith and facing death. Vicki will live in our memories for ever and we look back on the years, and the memories are very sweet’ (a family Vicki often stayed with at Mt. Gambier. Not Christians).
- ‘Praise God for Vicki’s life and witness’ (a brother in Christ, Church family).
- ‘Vicki’s witness and life has been, and continues to be a challenge and blessing’ (ABI student).
- ‘We can’t think of Vicki without praising God for His grace in her and through her to others. We praise the Lord for the time we had with her last year and know she has continued to be a real blessing to many as she was to us’ (ABI couple working in Papua New Guinea).
- ‘I thank God for every remembrance of your dear Vicki’ (ABI student).
- ‘I praise God for her who taught me so much, and influenced others so much. I have mental pictures’ of her hearing the immortal words, “Well done, good and faithful servant”. What a difference Christ makes to life: what a difference Christ makes to death’ (ABI student).
- ‘Now that Vicki is with the Lord I just want to let you know what a source of inspiration and courage she has been. We know that this is God Himself and that is what has made her so precious in our sight. The Lord has brought, and I know He will continue to bring, glory to His Name through dear Vicki’s sufferings’ (ABI student).
- ‘Vicki was one of my dearest friends and as I prayed last night I felt it was a precious gift of God’s love to have had the privilege of being so close to Vicki, of praying with her, and of having such a gentle teacher who taught me many things

The Glory on the Inside

with the compassion of Christ. The Lord truly refined your lovely daughter through many trials and she came forth as pure gold. In dear Vicki we had an example of holiness and one who truly thirsted after God. In all of her experiences she looked to Jesus who truly *is* the author and finisher of our faith. May we be more hungry for the depths of Jesus, our Messiah–King, and follow His ways all our days, that when we meet Him, we shall not be ashamed and shall share abundantly in the joy that now is Vicki’s forever’ (ABI student).

- ‘... to me, Vicki radiated the love of Christ in her gentle, quiet way, and was a very sweet friend’ (ABI student).