

CHAPTER 1

THE MIRACLE OF OUR MARRIAGE BEING REWRITTEN

Prologue-April 2008

Byron and I both felt compelled to attend a series of meetings in North Queensland to hear a prophet from Africa, Dr Bernard Blessing. We'd never met or heard of him before but somehow this invitation to go for these Easter meetings gripped our attention and we couldn't dismiss it.

We made preparation for our time away from our own church and travelled to Rockhampton for meetings on Good Friday and Saturday.

He was the type of speaker who didn't socialise during the conference but retired to his room to seek God on behalf of those attending.

Unsure why we were there, we waited for the meetings to commence to find out the reason. We didn't have to wait long; over the course of the next few meetings he brought a number of prophetic words to us on three separate occasions. All have since either been fulfilled, or partially fulfilled. (More on some of these later) One of the prophetic words was very specific: that I would write a series of small books, one of which was to describe "the miracle of our marriage".

What's in your hand is a glimpse into some of the remarkable things that God has done to transform our lives. Experiences from our everyday life that have opened the door for miracles in many and varied places. Each one of our encounters with

the heavenly plan, has pointed us in the direction of wanting to see the promise of God unlocked and then explode upon our present world only to discover that God has only ever been a whisper away.

But Ruth said “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also if anything but death parts you and me.”(Ruth 1:16-17)

The following pages are about ‘Rehearsing the Promises’ of God over our lives. Our future has been totally rewritten by the intervention of a loving God who saw more in us than we could ever see ourselves.

We are unrecognisable from who we used to be in almost every way and no-one could be more grateful for these changes than Byron and I. It is a miracle.

I can identify with Ruth, a Moabite woman who came from a dysfunctional, immoral heritage. She had nothing going for her at all and found herself in a desperate situation with no future to be hopeful about.

“The people of Moab were idol worshippers and special enemies of God’s people. They were even forbidden to marry the Israelites and not allowed to enter the temple.....” (Deuteronomy 23:3)

Despite her background, Ruth makes a decision that would alter the course of her life forever. From scripture it appears

that Ruth and Naomi (her mother-in-law) had a close relationship and it seems reasonable to assume that Naomi had shared with her about the God of Israel.

The identifying picture for me was when Ruth made the huge decision to leave family and friends behind and to follow in the footsteps of her mother-in-law. This decision would ultimately alter the entire course of not just her life but the generations to come. She finished up with King David and Jesus in her lineage!

History Changed

Our story has been generational too. In hindsight I can look back and understand why we were shifted from our small, familiar and comfortable beginnings. Without even realizing it we were held captive to our old life, after all, this was all we knew and it had problems along with its pleasures.

We were about to face a geographical move from one side of the nation to the other. In time it became evident that the relocating from one place to the next was the preparation we needed.

Everything was too small. Our thinking was centred on the next thing we would do to be entertained. We had no real plans or vision for the future. We had zero understanding of what plans a big God had for us and we discovered that we would soon face a stretch from containment to freedom that would one day spill over and impact people that we were yet to meet. I have since discovered that whenever the Lord is preparing you for something He will expose you to a situation that will require a much bigger vision than the one you have been living in.

My secure little world was about to be turned upside down and rearranged by the 'Master Designer' Himself. Everything was about to be changed, where we lived, our circle of friends, our habits and lifestyle.

If you were to ask me has this journey been worth it? I can only give you a resounding 'YES'. I would do it all over again.

Today we are privileged to enjoy our children and their spouses along with our grandchildren in the House of God. They have always been an integral and vital part of pioneering Highway Christian Church. For me this is one of the true riches in life.

Our story of brokenness has given us a message to tell. I tell it not out of self indulgence, but rather to bring you the message that anything is possible with the Lord. We are living proof that this works.

From messy backgrounds to a message that's worth hearing about. One of the strengths upon our lives today is to see lives restored; the ability to overcome. The beginning of your life story may be brokenness and dysfunction but that is not the end of the story.

New beginnings are yours if you will make the journey. You may be starting a long way behind like we did, it doesn't matter.

You can do nothing about your past, but you can do something about your future. When you introduce the power of God, you are enabled to move beyond every circumstance and to break free and move forward from any background issues.

There is a new story over your life waiting to be embraced. When you do, you will soon realise that there are chapters of

your life waiting to be written. There is a divine design and it's yours if you want it.

Life is exciting when you journey with God. Extraordinary possibilities lie ahead. Perhaps like me you will look back and wonder, "How did I get here?"

So how did we get from where we were to the people you see today? Come with me on my journey and I will share some of our experiences along the way. My hope is that you will see the hand of God woven through our lives.

I'll start at the beginning.

CHAPTER 2

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

“To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (Isaiah 61:3)

When I tell people how shy I was as a child they look at me with disbelief. How can someone who has been intensely shy speak so confidently before large audiences as I do today? I'll tell you how.

Firstly, the Grace of God. Secondly, I decided that I would not say 'no' to any invitation that God gave me. Through that process He turned the ashes of a broken past that lacked confidence and self-worth to something for which I can only give Him praise today.

The overriding emotion I remember from my childhood was fear. Our home was always a place of tension, arguments and unpredictability. As a child I felt I was constantly walking on eggshells, trying to please my father. I reasoned that if I got out of his way and withdrew then I wouldn't draw attention to myself in any way.

My earliest recollection of my childhood is at age five, living in the magistrate's house in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia with my parents. It was a large house set on a hill with verandas all around. My father was in the Crown Law Department and was a highly professional, skilled and talented man. My mother was a very competent nursing sister and worked at the local hospital.

So outwardly I lived with two highly successful, capable career people but the emotional side of life was a disaster. Their relationship was volatile and unpredictable and they were both very unhappy at times. For all his brilliance, my father was also very religious and a strict disciplinarian. I always felt that he had unrealistic expectations of me and I didn't know how to live up to them.

My young heart was broken countless times when I witnessed domestic violence. It was such a common thing in my home and marked me to such a degree that I determined that I would never marry a physically abusive man.

Due to their professional positions my parents both learned not to take their private world into their public world and I learnt to live life in much the same manner. Tears were shed in the privacy of my bedroom; I'd then pull myself together, tuck all the pain away somewhere and get on with the rest of the day even if the exhaustion of the night before had drained me of any joy. However, the sting of words remained even though I pretended they didn't matter.

At age six we suddenly left Kalgoorlie. To this day I don't know why my father gave up his law career that was destined for the High Court. We returned to Perth and he took on various accounting jobs, which would have equated to lesser roles in his eyes. He received a lot of his identity from the position he held which I suppose is characteristic of many.

The overriding feeling for me in those early Perth years was one of instability. Our family moved from house to house as my father moved from job to job. I, of course, was moved from one school to the next. There was no consistency in our

lives and the pressure in our home seemed to intensify. The tension would inevitably erupt into violence at times and fear was a familiar companion in my world.

By age nine my mother was appointed Matron of a country hospital in the small town of Boddington, a couple of hours south west of Perth. Life seemed to settle into a comfortable rhythm as my mother, younger sister and I lived in the Matron's house which was attached to the hospital.

My father had secured a job in Katanning, which was about two hours drive from where we lived. He stayed there during the week and spent weekends with us. This meant life from Monday to Friday was stable and easy but I dreaded the weekends. I would try and remove myself as much as possible from the house and got involved with anything that would give me an excuse not to be at home.

Despite the panic that could come with the weekends there was a highlight, my father would take me to church on Sundays. I was receiving religious education at school and desperately wanted to be confirmed. We attended a high Anglican Church and I eagerly learnt the catechism from cover to cover. Sundays became the highlight of my week, something I looked forward to.

Unfortunately on the Sunday of the Confirmation service I was extremely ill with a high fever and delirium. The doctor advised I be hospitalised but because of my mother's position as matron, he released me into her care. I didn't care if I had to crawl on my hands and knees to get there, I was determined I was going to be confirmed and no fever or anything else was going to prevent it. I somehow made it through the service

and then staggered back to my seat before fainting and having to be carried out of the church. I don't remember feeling the presence of God or experiencing anything unusual but I do believe that God marked me that day for things ahead.

By age 11 my father convinced my mother to move to Katanning where he had a stable job. It was quite a sacrifice on my mother's part as it meant another shift of home, school and once again having to break into a new circle of friends.

The years in Katanning were difficult. My father became more demanding and harder to live with. The older I got the more the pressure seemed to intensify. In hindsight I believe he wanted the very best for me but his methods were questionable. His approach was to use verbal intimidation, bullying and fear. I hated it and found my own way in coping with things.

Living in a rural town there wasn't much to do other than sporting activities and I happily signed up to as many as possible. I didn't feel the need to excel at any of them; they offered me a welcome distraction outside the house. However, at the end of the day I still had to go home and I never knew what I would step into.

The result of all this created a shyness, timidity and lack of confidence which I carried into adult years. I felt inadequate that I could not measure up to my father's exacting standards. I don't remember him embracing me or ever telling me that he loved me. I wouldn't dream of discussing anything with him because I never knew how he would react. He did seem to treat my younger sister differently, perhaps because she was seven years younger.

On the positive side, my father continued to take me to church. I loved everything about it, including the lovely kind-faced Reverend Kirby who preached messages that I never really understood. However, despite not fully getting it I was still somehow drawn to the whole church experience.

I was the only one my father took to church out of the family. I don't know why but it was the one activity my father and I did together and I was thrilled with these times we shared.

At some point my father's church attendance stopped and I suppose over time my own interest also waned. When attending church on Sundays was no longer a priority, Sunday became just like any other day of the week.

Then heartbreak struck: when I was 15 my parents left Katanning to move back to Perth. I was just finishing off Year 10 and had a wide circle of friends that I had established over the last few years. I didn't often invite them home due to the unpredictable atmosphere. I remember looking out of the window of the car as we drove away and making a promise in my heart that I would return. My world was there. My friends and the little world of networking I had established through sporting involvements meant everything to me and brought a great deal of satisfaction.

Back in Perth when I turned 16 I went to work in the office of David Jones department store for a year. I then decided to go back to Leederville Technical College and completed Years 11 and 12 in nine months.

By the end of that year my life at home was so bad I wanted to return to Katanning. I applied for a job in a solicitor's office and to my surprise I got the job. I was elated; this was my

ticket out of Perth. So at the grand old age of 17 my mother tearfully farewelled me as I boarded a Greyhound bus to travel about 4 hours south west of Perth to Katanning.

I arrived in Katanning with one small suitcase and found a small house to rent which had originally been a larger house divided in two. I earned a whopping \$50 a week compared to others of my age who were earning around \$21-25 per week. This new found wealth enabled me to buy a car even while paying \$35 a week rent.

I enjoyed my work and most of all the freedom of the lifestyle it provided for about 18 months until one day it came to an abrupt end. I was sitting at my desk working when two policemen came to the door to inform me that my employment had been terminated as my boss had been arrested for embezzlement.

I was now 18 and unemployed. I decided to try my hand at nursing and worked for the local hospital. At one time I even considered further study in the medical field but soon realised that I didn't want to make a career out of it and returned to office work.

My life dramatically changed again in 1977 when I received a phone call from my mother at 8:40pm on a Saturday evening telling me that my father had just died at home of a heart attack. With three and a half hours travel time ahead of me I wasted no time in jumping in the car and drove to Perth, arriving at about 12:30am. My mother and I sat up for the remainder of the night trying to come to terms with what had just taken place. My father was only 44 years old.

The responsibility fell on me to arrange and attend the funeral service on my own. My mother was too traumatised and my sister considered too young so I was the only one to represent the family at the funeral. When I look back I realise it was a responsibility I was not ready to carry.

For many years I carried a deep sense of regret about my relationship with my father. Was I a disappointment to him? Should I have followed in the legal future he would have wanted for my life? Could I have handled things better and improved our relationship? So many questions filled my mind and no answers satisfied me. I regretted that I was unable to say goodbye and we never had the opportunity to get to know one another as adults.

He had an enormous impact on my life in so many ways and he never had the opportunity to see the person I became. As a child I resented the way he went about things but as an adult I can now appreciate what he put into me. He instilled some great ethics and I have developed some strong personal boundaries because of him.

Both of my parents modelled hard work and my father in particular would not tolerate laziness. To him there was no such word as “can’t”. If something didn’t work one way you found another way around it, giving excuses never went down well even if they were legitimate.

After the funeral I stayed on for a time to keep my mother and sister company and then returned to work at Katanning. I had created an independent lifestyle for myself and life continued. But the next major chapter in my life was about to unfold: I met Byron.

CHAPTER 3

A ROUGH DIAMOND

“For the Lord does not see as a man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

Byron arrived in Katanning on a motorbike with a group of his friends and \$1.67 between them. He had ridden the entire width of the country from Queensland without a license. In spite of having no money and no real prospects for the future, I was drawn to his larrikinism, and despite him being everything that my father would have disapproved of.

His long hair, pierced ear and jeans with holes in them (before they were fashionable) didn't exactly fit the image of someone that I thought I would be attracted to but somehow it worked. Had my father witnessed any of this Byron wouldn't have even made it down the driveway.

Byron still teases me that my opening comment when I first met him at age 20 was very forward: “You'll have to take me for a ride on your bike some day.” That comment was the start of a friendship and partnership that would ultimately last for a lifetime.

By the time the news reached my mother that her daughter was dating a bikie from Queensland the relationship was already well established.

Our first date was at the Katanning Drive-In-theatre, which was the only form of entertainment in the town besides the

pub. The only problem was that he only owned a bike and I had a car so I had to pick him up. It wasn't exactly the way I had pictured my ideal first date in my head but nonetheless that's the way it happened.

He was convinced he had found a girl with money as no-one he'd previously dated owned a new car. So my immaculate mustard yellow, black interior Datsun 120Y made its way to his front door and a relationship that neither of us was quite prepared for began.

Living in a small town had its problems, our social life was centred on parties and alcohol and the group of Queensland boys Byron was friends with were familiar to the world of drugs.

I had an intense fear and hatred of drugs. My father had always told me that if I ever took drugs he would kill me and he meant it. As I said before, his methods were sometimes questionable and he could be violent, but he instilled solid ethics in me in certain areas and this was one of them. I knew without a doubt that I could not compromise on this at all.

We commenced dating when I was 21 and Byron was about to turn 21. When we started dating I said to him three things that I knew he would have to agree to if we were to build a future together. Due to my background of domestic violence and alcohol related problems I was determined that history would not repeat itself with me.

Firstly I said, "If you ever lay a hand on me the relationship is finished. Secondly, if you are ever unfaithful to me the relationship is finished and thirdly you will have to choose between the drugs and me." He chose me.

While Byron stayed true to these stipulations, on the downside alcohol had a strong grip on his life. He had grown up with alcoholic parents and his whole upbringing centred on alcohol. His parent's lives were very damaged and controlled by this habit and his life was showing all the familiar patterns as well.

He had a close relationship with his father but it was more mateship than parental control and positive influence. In fact his main way of relating to his father and spending time with him was to sit at the bar drinking.

Byron had now become a heavy drinker seven days a week. With no control or limitations on alcohol I again found myself living in an unpredictable world. While there was no violence or unfaithfulness, there was plenty of instability and insecurity that developed as a result of this life controlling addiction.

This one area of vulnerability had opened a door, a big one that would lead to clouded judgment, daily tension and a life that seemed to be void of purpose and direction.

CHAPTER 5

NEW BEGINNINGS: February 1981 70 Sallows Street, Alexandra Hills

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Like most people I can vividly remember both the time and the place when I gave my heart to the Lord. When the healing of old wounds began and the promise of a new life in Christ unfolded.

During our early years of marriage while we were living in Brisbane, some friends invited us to their wedding. They were both unsaved and had been living together in Rockhampton. When they decided they wanted to marry, they looked around for someone to perform the ceremony and randomly chose Pastor Claude Fingleton, who still pastors the Cathedral of Praise in Rockhampton. He agreed to marry them on the condition they attend marriage counselling and during this process he introduced them to the gospel message and led them to the Lord.

By the time we met up with them just prior to the wedding we noticed they had changed: they were now born again believers. I wasn't exactly sure what that meant but now every conversation we had with them was about Jesus, constantly and relentlessly. They were reading the bible, attending church regularly and talking to us non-stop about eternity. We found it a bit confronting at times and we weren't

really interested in their kind of life. As far as I was concerned I believed that God was there, somewhere! Their radical turnaround seemed a little over the top, maybe in time they would settle down and get over whatever it was that had happened to them.

For nine months (the length of a pregnancy!) they prayed and fasted for us. Byron became agitated over the whole thing, to the point that he got angry about these conversations. He worked with his friend at a butcher's shop and would come home and say, "If he mentions Jesus again I will get physical with him!" I was still not physically or emotionally in great shape but the walls were starting to come down in my mind. Church and God were now things I found myself thinking about a lot and I recalled many experiences of church life from my childhood. At times I tried to ignore some of these thoughts knowing that if I were to reconnect with some of my beliefs then it might add more pressure to an already fragile marriage. If I woke during the night to go to the bathroom immediately my mind would think about God, He seemed to be everywhere, night or day. Whatever this was would not let me go or go away.

The turning point came when I was returning on a flight from Perth and flying over the Great Australian Bight. I looked out at the vast ocean and thought about what would happen if the plane were to go down, where would I spend eternity? The conversations with my friends were constantly in my thoughts. What if they were right? I started to think about my connection with this unseen God to whom my heart had been so much more open in the past. However even my childhood experience seemed remotely distant from the close relationship they seemed to have with their creator.

For months I had tried to shake off their conversations and forget about eternity and all the other church language that they used. Ignoring them and shrugging it off as fanaticism didn't seem to help either. After all, I reasoned, I'm not such a bad person, surely that has to account for something, surely God would accept me. I had gone to church and lived my life well but despite all my reasoning there was a huge tug of war going on inside me to fully surrender my life to a God I thought I knew a little about. It culminated on a Saturday afternoon in February 1981 when I knelt down on the timber floor of our lounge room and prayed a basic prayer to Jesus asking Him into my heart and to be born again.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believed in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

The next morning I leapt out of bed knowing I had to find a church, but where? What were their service times and locations? What denomination should I go to? I had no idea other than a burning desire to find a church irrespective of what type.

Settling in behind the wheel of the car I felt energized as I drove until I finally stumbled upon a building that resembled a church reminiscent of my childhood. As I walked through the doorway I felt that I was entering more than a building but the beginnings of a new start, nervousness and excitement all rolled into one as the service commenced. Somehow this felt right; I barely understood most of what the Minister was speaking about, there were names I could barely pronounce and stories about people and places that I wasn't sure what connection they had to my life, but it felt safe and good to be

there. Sunday came and went and I found myself longing for the next weekend to arrive so I could attend church once more. A whole new world had opened up to me and I liked it.

Byron questioned me over my decision and was very cautious about what was happening before his eyes. Obviously there was more going on in him than what I could see and it culminated into him making a decision one week later.

The following Saturday he sent me out of the same lounge room that I had knelt down in a few days earlier and committed his life to Christ. He awkwardly prayed some kind of prayer that wasn't exactly text book style and made a deal with the Lord, "If you will accept me as I am, then I'm in one hundred percent, if you will reveal yourself to me in some way". He also had no intention of giving up his lifestyle or the alcohol so if God would accept him in that condition and he could continue life as normal then everything would be fine with his new decision. Alcohol was an addiction. One drink usually led to inebriation and ultimately trouble in our already fragile marriage. It brought nothing good into our home.

Byron had no church background and had long-held prejudices against people who went to church but nevertheless the following Sunday morning he wanted to come to church with me. This was foreign to me; he had never before woken up on Sunday morning wanting to go to church. These were words I had never heard come out of his mouth.

We walked into a traditional church but it left us both uninspired. Byron remarked that he couldn't see what our friends saw in all this, it wasn't really pressing his buttons at all and to be honest I wasn't too excited either.

The only thing we had enough knowledge about at that time was to pray. If God wanted us to go to church somewhere then it made sense that He would help us find the right one. We didn't have to wait too long for the answer we needed and found ourselves feeling at home in a Uniting Church where we settled and grew at an accelerated pace.

Three weeks later the alcohol issue still loomed large over our lives and continued to present enormous problems for us. It was a destroyer of stability, drained our finances and, like any other addiction, took over completely. It hung over us like a dark shadow every single day, sometimes beginning as early as 6am and not stopping until he passed out. I had turned my back on the party scene when I fell pregnant with Shane but three weeks into our new life this problem was still present in our home despite church attendance.

Wednesday night was traditionally football night and a group of Byron's friends would arrive loaded with cartons of beer to watch the match. However this Wednesday something happened. This would be a night like no other.

Every time Byron tried to get the drink close enough to his mouth to swallow, he would start to feel extremely unwell. Despite his persistence and determination he just couldn't get that glass anywhere near his face. The smell of it repulsed him which eventually led him to make a memorable trip to the toilet which resulted in violent vomiting. I wasn't sure whether he was unwell or what was happening, but the usual Wednesday festivities were taking a different turn.

He didn't realise it at the time but he was being delivered from alcohol. The Grace of God had set him free from this

generational stronghold and addiction! This was a defining moment and one that neither of us would ever forget as God was revealing His power at work in our lives. This was momentous – life changing. To go from something that controlled you for so long and in a moment to be free, we could barely find the words. The taste for it had gone, the desire for it had completely left. The power of God had shown up in an unusual way and life would never be the same again, of that I was sure. He had walked into the toilet an alcoholic and walked out a free man.

Addiction of any kind is a powerful thing, take heart as you never know at what point God will show up and set you free.

“He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.” (Isaiah 61:1)

Our friends who had prayed so diligently for us were at a Pentecostal church, the Southside Christian Renewal Centre, and they continued to invite us to attend meetings with them. They spoke of baptism with full immersion in water which was foreign to my religious background. I didn't really understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit either, this was new territory and I wasn't sure I wanted to go there.

To satisfy them we accompanied them to a Tuesday evening service in March 1981. A number of things about the meeting were strange to me. Firstly, I was used to church attendance being restricted to Sundays. Secondly, when we arrived the music was vibrant and the people were very vocal in their praise and worship. Thirdly, a pint sized American lady was preaching and I was unused to seeing a woman preach. She

was passionate and loud and to make matters worse she was speaking on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To say that I was uncomfortable and out of my comfort zone would be an understatement.

We were seated in the second row which seemed a little too close to the front for my liking. (I'm not sure why but being seated in the second row seems to be a strategic position for God to move in our lives!) At the end of the meeting she pointed her finger at me and said, "And will you respond to the Lord tonight?" I was too scared to say no and quickly got up and moved to the left of the row to go forward.

My heart was pounding in my chest, my head was racing and I was utterly amazed to find myself responding to something I had very little understanding about. I remember very little other than her hands being placed on my head and the presence of God washing over me and then falling to the ground speaking in a language I had never heard come from my lips before.

Afterwards our friends told me that Byron had also responded to the altar call and had moved to the right of our row so I couldn't see him. Apparently when the presence of the Lord came on him he had fallen backwards and hit his head on an overhead projector.

The whole experience was new to me, still soaking up this lingering sense of the Holy Spirit upon me as I looked upon Byron lying on the floor not making a move. Was he unconscious from hitting his head or had God transported him straight to heaven – I wasn't sure.

After a few more minutes he managed to make his way back to his feet and was completely unaware of any collision with the projector and felt no pain at all.

That evening marked another turning point in our lives: we knew life would be different from that night on and it was. We had such an insatiable hunger for the Lord that we didn't think was humanly possible. We joined Southside Christian Renewal Centre in Salisbury and grew dramatically in the things of God. We both disliked Sunday evening coming to an end as it meant that we had to wait an entire week before we could attend another service.

We felt like racehorses, running hard after anything that God wanted to share with us. Even our marriage began to take on a new perspective and fresh hope began to awaken within us that something could be salvaged from our brokenness. If God could bring deliverance from addiction then maybe He could help us to repair a damaged relationship. One thing was for certain, we were up for anything.