

A GIRL'S VIEWPOINT

Annie Zac Poonen

*Copyright - Dr. Annie Zac Poonen (1999)
This book has been copyrighted to prevent misuse.
It should not be reprinted or translated without
written permission from the 7author.*

*Permission is however given for any part of this book
to be downloaded and printed
provided it is for FREE distribution,
provided NO ALTERATIONS are made,
provided the AUTHOR'S NAME AND ADDRESS are mentioned,
and provided this copyright notice is included
in each printout.*

For further details, please contact:

*Christian Fellowship Church
40, DaCosta Square ,
Wheeler Road Extension,
Bangalore-560084,
India.*

Note: The story in this book is purely fictional, and not based in any way on real-life incidents or characters.

CONTENTS

1. Childhood Days

2. New Beginnings

3. A Helpful Guide

4. Overcoming Bad Habits

5. Walls And Doors

6. Problems Of Hostel Life

7. Finishing School

8. A New Career

9. Growing In Wisdom

10. Looking Ahead

11. Rivers Of Living Water

12. A Young Man!

13. A Beautiful Garden

14. Heirs Together

15. The Body Of Christ

16. Looking Back

CHAPTER ONE

CHILDHOOD DAYS

I really love the name my parents gave me - Krupa. It means "grace". It was prophetic. The story of my life is the story of God's amazing grace.

Daddy worked in the office of a private company. He earned a moderate salary. But he wasted most of his earnings on drink. He usually came back home late at night every day; and Mummy would accuse him of visiting other women and being unfaithful to her.

Mummy was working as a clerk in a government office. She had a decent salary. But she was always buying new sarees. So we had no savings at all. Mummy would, now and then, bring home ball-pens, envelopes and letter-pads that she had pilfered from her office.

We lived in a two-bedroom house and Daddy's parents lived with us.

Ours was an unhappy home in many ways. There were constant shoutings and beatings. Mummy bore the brunt of this, but we children got our share too. Often the domestic

quarrels would involve Daddy's mother too - and Mummy was always the loser. But I wondered at times why Mummy screamed so loud that even the neighbours knew what was going on. That used to embarrass me.

In order to punish Daddy, Mummy would not leave any of the good food for him or for his parents. She and we children ate up all the special dishes secretly in our bedroom!

But I did not like the way Mummy treated Daddy. Sometimes they had such heated arguments late into the night that we could not even sleep properly.

One day, when I was about 12 years old, Mummy took me and my younger brother to see a lady whom she had met at a Christian prayer-meeting.

When we met the lady, I was really embarrassed to see Mummy becoming very emotional and telling her all about our hardships at home, even though the lady was a total stranger. But I noticed something kind and soothing about the way that lady reacted to all this information.

I soon realised that Mummy had come to see her because she had wanted to put us both in an orphanage, to save us from the problems we faced with a drunken father.

The lady was very kind and patient. She told Mummy that she did not know of any orphanage personally. But she gave Mummy some very good advice. She told Mummy first of all to forgive Daddy for all that he did to her and to have the hope that he would change one day. She also warned Mummy that although we children may be growing up with a difficult father, life in an orphanage would be much worse, for we would then be without even a mother's love!

The lady spoke to me too. She told me to be obedient to my parents, and to respect and honour Daddy even if he had many imperfections. She told me that even Jesus, the Son of God, when He came to earth, had been submissive to His earthly parents, even though He Himself was sinless while His earthly parents were not.

She then prayed with all of us and we went away feeling very much better.

I had many questions as a growing girl. But Mummy was always busy with her office-work and her household duties and never seemed to have any time to talk with me. I also did not feel free to share my problems with her. So I grew up feeling quite lonely and with many unanswered questions. I decided then that if ever I got married and had children, I would spend a lot of time with each of them.

Mummy finally found a Christian hostel for girls in a hill-station, a few hundred miles away from our home. And she put me there.

CHAPTER TWO

NEW BEGINNINGS

Life in the hostel was a new adjustment for me.

I was often sad and gloomy, thinking of my home. But I was also happy that I could go to school and be with other children, some of whom, like me, were from unhappy homes. The food was a simple, vegetarian diet, but it was good. On Sundays there would be some meat too.

Sometimes Mummy would send me a gift of a small amount of money with which I could buy something special. I bought a pair of high-heeled sandals once, which I cleaned every day and kept very carefully. I was so fussy about this that my friends would playfully kick it around to annoy me.

One night we had a special function in the hostel. We were shown a film on the life of Jesus. We had a Bible in our home, but I don't remember anyone ever reading it. It just accumulated dust on a book-shelf! But now I heard the stories of Jesus at the daily Bible-reading and prayer-times that we had in the hostel. However, I did not understand what Jesus had done for me personally. When I saw the film, it struck me forcefully, for the first time, how much Jesus loved me - that He should come to this wretched earth and die for my sins.

I thought of my own life then, of how I had often caused so much sorrow to my parents by my stubbornness. I was reminded too of my selfishness in being unwilling to share my things with my friends. I also thought of my lying, my stealing, my anger, and many other sins that I had committed that I am too ashamed to even mention - for all of which I now realised Jesus had died and borne my punishment.

I wept that night after the lights were out, and asked Jesus to forgive me and to make me His child. A flood of joy and peace suddenly came into my heart. I, who had never felt loved by anyone before, became aware of the love of my Saviour immediately. I knew that I was now His special child and that He would never cast me away. A deep security came into my heart - a heart that had always been unsure of the love of my parents. I realised then that I belonged to the Lord Jesus and that He was mine forever.

I don't know how this sense of security came to me, for no-one had taught me about such matters. But as I look back now, I can see how the Holy Spirit can make the things of Christ real even to a simple mind that has never studied the Bible.

That was the turning point of my life. I wrote home about this experience and wanted my mother and all at home to share the same joy.

Very soon I entered into my teenage years. I was now thirteen years old.

During the school-holidays that summer I went home. But I discovered that hostel life was better than life at home - because in the hostel I could pray, keep my life in order, be disciplined, talk to my friends and attend meetings in the chapel. We were also taken out at times from the hostel to some park or beautiful spot on the hillside - and such picnics were a real treat that all of us looked forward to. Compared to all this, life at home was boring and uneventful. But I enjoyed playing with my younger brother whom I missed when I was in the hostel.

During that visit to my home I made a startling discovery. A 17-year-old relative of mine, whom I had always considered as a brother, came to visit us, as he often used to do in the past. But this time I found, that whenever we were alone with each other, he would touch my body here and there and try to get close to me physically. He had never behaved like that before. No-one had ever told me anything about boy-girl relationships or about sexual matters. But I was alert enough to know that something was wrong in his behaviour. So I avoided him thereafter and he became very angry.

It was only the Lord who protected me from the plight of some of my hostel-mates, who I later discovered had been lured by their close relatives into sexual sin, at an age when they were innocent and ignorant. My relative's behaviour was another reason why I wanted to leave home and go back to the hostel. I realised that even a close relative could have an impure attitude.

CHAPTER THREE

A HELPFUL GUIDE

As a teenager I gradually realised that I was developing into a woman. All sorts of feelings were coming into my mind. I who wanted to be loved, found myself now desiring the love of some man!! I began to day-dream of some nice man who would love me. Such thoughts would run wild at times.

I saw that this fantasy world of mine was like a powerful giant in my life that was hindering my communion with Jesus. I found that I preferred fantasizing than talking to Jesus, Who was the only real Friend I had. I was not able to break free from this habit.

I noticed that some of the girls in the hostel had an abnormal attachment to each other and were very possessive of each other. I was embarrassed to see the way they expressed their affection for each other. They would go off by themselves into their rooms and lock the doors. I didn't know what they did there. But I later discovered that they were indulging in 'lesbianism' (homosexual behaviour) - something that God hated and had clearly forbidden in His Word (Rom.1:26,27). I avoided the company of those girls.

Most of the girls in the hostel had not given their lives to Jesus. They used to fight with each other and would not talk to each other for weeks.

In the hostel, I saw that one of our teachers had a radiance on her face that was striking. I came to know that she was a committed Christian who loved the Lord Jesus. I shared some of my problems with her, since she seemed to be so understanding. She always gave me sound advice. I discovered that Jesus was the source of her strength and her wisdom.

This teacher became my example for many years thereafter, even after I had left the hostel. I never realised, till much later, that she had affected my life so much and that I had imbibed so much of her spirit. Her example became the foundation for a lot of good in my life.

She spoke to us of simple things. When she taught us in the Science class about flowers, for example, she mentioned the lily as a flower that stood for purity. She said that our life on earth was like a lily that was alive and bright one day and gone the next. She told us about the rose that gave out its scent mostly at night - a picture of how we could be kind and radiant even when going through dark trials. The violet, she said, bloomed mostly in shady places - a picture of humility and lowliness. Many flowers, she told us, bloom where no one ever sees them. So we too must live to please God alone and not to impress people. Many flowers are trampled upon, but none of them retaliate. So we too should learn from them how to bear insults without holding grudges and be willing to forgive others quickly. Such lessons formed a deep impression on my young mind - and formed my character.

This teacher was also our hostel-warden. She taught us how to take care of ourselves when we matured. She taught us how to be hygienically minded at all times, to bathe regularly, being especially careful to wash the parts of our body that had become dirty and where we perspired the most. She taught us that the days of our monthly cycle were not to be considered as a sickness, but a normal part of the wonderful way that our Creator had made our bodies. She taught us to take everything in our stride in a natural way and to exercise, by walking or playing games, to keep our bodies fit. She said we should be slim and smart, not fat and sluggish! She even joined us in our games.

She also taught us to keep our hair clean and free from lice - which was very common among the girls in the hostel. We had to keep our things tidily in our rooms and keep the surrounding premises clean. Our clothes had to be washed regularly and repaired when necessary.

She would often quote some wise words from the book of Proverbs in the Bible, and encouraged us to memorise verses from the Bible. We loved the singing classes and we learned many lovely songs of worship, that I used to sing to the Lord when I was alone. These choruses helped to lift my spirit, whenever I was discouraged. I learnt in those days the tremendous power that there is in praising God at all times.

Our warden encouraged us to study regularly and not to leave all our studying to just before the exams. She told us not to be terrified of exams, but to study diligently, never to cheat and to leave the rest to God. She taught us a Bible verse that said that God would keep us in perfect peace, if our minds were set on Him (Psa.26:3). Many would get unnecessarily stressed at examination time. But our warden helped us to be relaxed.

In the history classes, our warden taught us not only about the kings who ruled India, but also about the missionaries who had sacrificed their lives and come to our land to make India a better place.

She told us about William Carey who was only a cobbler in England, but who came to India and sacrificed much in order to give the gospel to our countrymen. He underwent a lot of hardships in our land, but in the end did an amazing job of translating the Bible into many Indian languages. It was through this one man that many Indians got the Word of God in their mother-tongues.

Then she told us about Amy Carmichael who had come from Ireland and started a home for orphans in a place called Dohnavur in Tamilnadu. She had rescued little baby-girls who were thrown away by their parents and spent her life bringing up those girls to be God-fearing women.

She also told us about John Hyde (also known as "Praying Hyde") who came as a missionary to the Punjab, who brought many souls to Christ.

These stories challenged me more than the history-lessons on Ashoka and Shahjehan!!

I was so thankful that our warden took such pains with each of us. We spoke frankly with her on a variety of topics. I often used to wish that my mother had been like her.

One day the warden told me that she herself had been an orphan, brought up by Amy Carmichael in Dohnavur. She had then done her teacher training course and taken up this job in the hostel.

She was truly an impartial lady and loved us all very much.

She often encouraged me personally to develop disciplined habits in my life. She told me she had found great value in having a regular time of Bible reading and prayer every day - a quiet time daily with the Lord. She encouraged me to ask the Lord for help in overcoming the battles I faced - in the fantasy world of my thought-life, and the grudges that I had against some of my hostel-mates.

I had forgiven my father long ago. But now there were others whom I was gradually becoming bitter with. I realised that the battle against bitterness is one that we have to fight all through life - for people may harm us at any time. But God can give us grace to forgive them and to love them.

That is the wonderful power there is in the gospel of Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

OVERCOMING BAD HABITS

I realised that if my life were to change, my reading habits had to change first. I was in the habit of reading romantic novels, because they excited my imagination. But they added fuel to the flames in my heart and increased my longing to fantasize. To enable me to have a taste for healthier books, my warden-friend lent me some of the books she had in her own personal library. These books drew me to the Lord.

I asked the Lord then to take away my desire for the wrong type of books. Slowly I began to see a change in my outlook. I found some good books in the hostel-library about missionaries who had come to India and about heroes of the Christian faith through the ages. Slowly but surely I was able to bring my wandering thoughts into the captivity of the Lord and my world of fantasy began to drift away like a cloud. At last I was delivered from that wretched giant that had kept me captive for so long.

There was a TV in the hostel and the girls would often watch the movies that came on it. I too saw some of those movies. But I found that they brought back my fantasy-world once again. So I asked the Lord to deliver me from this habit altogether.

Looking for some distraction to overcome this temptation, I found a suitable corner in the corridor where I began to do some embroidery for my warden-friend. There was going to be a sale in our hostel and I could make some plastic baskets and other things like that. I developed an interest in stitching and knitting. I also learned to dress with some dignity, since I felt that my life had some worth at last.

My wandering thoughts were slowly brought into captivity by the Lord, but it was a constant battle. Sometimes the girls would tell me of an interesting program on TV, and I would watch it. I did not want to appear to be a "holy person" who shut her eyes to all television. But I found on the whole, that many of the TV programmes only corrupted my mind.

As I began to seek after God, I found myself becoming more sensitive to the needs of others - their inner spiritual needs. One girl who was very quiet came up to me one day and began to share her problems with me. Her mother had died and she had been sent to the hostel, so that her father could marry again. Her father had felt that he would not get a wife if he had the extra baggage of a daughter with him!! She showed me the burn-scars and the scars of many beatings that she had received from her father. She never wanted to go to her home again. At times her grandmother would come to see her, bringing her some sweets. But in her bitterness and hatred, she would never speak to her grandmother.

I realised that her soul was more scarred than her body. She and I shared many of our thoughts with each other; and we began to pray together too. Very soon, she too found the Lord Jesus as her own Saviour. This really thrilled me that I had brought a soul to the Saviour. We then began to pray for our families and for other girls like us who were hurting inside.

There were some handicapped children in our hostel. Their mothers had taken some medicines when pregnant, to abort them, and had been unsuccessful. One such girl had no teeth. Another was so retarded that she could not concentrate on her studies at all and was always put on kitchen duty. These retarded girls were mocked and ridiculed by the others. I thought how sad it was that these children had to suffer throughout their lives, because of the sins of their mothers. I could not find an answer to this mystery. But I felt that I could befriend them and bring some joy into their dark lives. I felt that God had placed me in that hostel for this very reason.

There were also girls in our hostel who had lost their mothers and who had been ill-treated by their step-mothers. Such girls hated all women, as a result. Some girls had been sexually abused by their fathers and now hated all men. There were others who always spoke rudely to everyone, because of some psychological "hang-over" from their past.

And of course all of us girls had our own bad moods now and then. But our warden was patient with us. She spent time with us and talked with us and encouraged us. She helped many of us to turn to the Lord Jesus; and we found grace to overcome our angry outbursts and our bad moods.

CHAPTER FIVE

WALLS AND DOORS

I read one day in the Song of Solomon that a girl must be like a wall and not like a door (ch.8:9). She must have modesty and a reserve where men are concerned, just like a wall, and not be wide open to them like a door.

Since ours was a girls' hostel with no contact with men at all, some girls had abnormal and `wild' ideas about men in general. They would be nervous and giggle and act silly whenever they saw men at church or in the town.

Our warden helped us to understand how to behave with men. She told us to talk naturally with them. She said it was dangerous only when we began to focus our attention on just one man. That, she said, should wait till we were considering marriage. She said it was wisest to talk with men about general matters and never about personal and private matters. To be "a wall" did not mean that we could not mingle with men in a natural way.

It only meant that we should be sober and modest. Her advice enabled us to deal with men in a natural way and not run away from them, when we saw them!

But there were some girls who considered themselves to be caged birds in the hostel. Like restless birds, they hated the restrictions that had been imposed on all of us for our good. They longed for `freedom'. But I had discovered that the only true freedom was to be a child of God set free from all bondage by the Lord Jesus. All the rules in the hostel were for our good, to protect us from dangers that we were not aware of.

Our warden once told us the story of a girl in the Bible called Dinah who wandered away from home and made a mess of her life and brought deep trouble for her family members also. I hadn't noticed that story before. But when she told us about it, I read the whole story in Genesis chapter 34. I felt it was a strong warning given by God Himself to all young girls not to wander forth in an irresponsible way. Dinah's actions even started a war where many people were killed. She is indeed a warning to all girls who disobey their parents and go out in search of freedom.

In the hostel most of us wore simple clothes. But that did not mean we were simple at heart. Many girls loved tight clothes and imitated the fashions of the actresses they had seen on TV, with their make-up and lipstick.

I did not want to be odd among them. But at the same time I did not want to dress like them. Then I saw clearly that a disciple of Jesus was a misfit in this world even among so-called "Christians". Many of the girls dressed only to make themselves attractive to men. It wasn't easy for me to decide what clothes I should wear. But I made a rule for myself that the clothes I wore should not make men stare at me. I could see the lustful way in which many boys stared at us whenever we went out as a group. I wanted to be a good testimony for the Lord in the way I dressed - without looking odd.

Submission to the authorities in the hostel was not enjoyable to any of us. Some girls rebelled and even went to the extent of doing sneaky things. Some of them were caught and got into a lot of trouble.

One girl used to boast about her boy-friends and was always ultra-modern in the way she dressed. One day, the warden noticed her looking sick and sent her to the doctor. It was then discovered that the girl had become pregnant!! She was asked to leave the hostel immediately and she had to go home in disgrace. I had always felt that something would go wrong with her, especially when I saw how she used to make herself prominent in the presence of men.

The safest course I realised was to avoid being alone with men even if they were close relatives. The downward path to immorality is sudden and steep and one can fall even before one has time to think of stopping.

Some of the girls who were proud of their charm and their slim figures and who walked around like the film-stars they had seen on television, were the ones who got into trouble

the most. Whenever we went to town by bus, the men used to pinch these girls here and there. I felt that they had asked for trouble by the way they dressed and walked!

I discovered a way to protect myself from these men, by covering the front of my body with a handbag whenever I was in a crowd - on the streets or in a bus. I tried my best whenever possible, to keep a safe distance from all such mischievous young men.

There were some occasions when a boy from town would follow after one of us girls repeatedly and even be bold enough to tell her that he loved her. We asked our warden what we should do in such cases.

She warned us not to infuriate such "Romeos" by hard words, because some of them could even harm us, if we spurned them in a rude way. There were cases, she told us, of young men who had thrown acid on the faces of the girls who had jilted them. But at the same time, she told us not to encourage any man in any way. We needed to be wise in dealing with such young men. The best thing to do was to ignore them, not look at them and say nothing at all in reply to their words.

She said that many of us were like innocent birds for whom Satan had laid out well-concealed traps. We were most vulnerable in our teens and early twenties. If a boy approached us with "words of love and affection", she told us not to take such words seriously or to get starry-eyed or to start dreaming about him and building castles in the air.

She warned us of young men who would threaten to commit suicide, if we refused to marry them. This she said, was just a clever tactic to pressurise a girl into a quick marriage. A wise girl would refuse to be moved by such threats. Those who yielded to such threats would end up as domestic slaves (and not as wives) to those boys. Such marriages usually end in divorce, when the boy finds another girl!! Such threats are usually made by boys who are uneducated, jobless and who are unable to support a family.

The best way, she said, was to ask God to protect us from falling into such traps. The promise in Psalm 91:3 says: "God delivers us from the snare of the trapper". She asked us to claim that promise and to have as our ambition, seeking to please God and studying hard to have a career in life. She assured us that God was always watching over us and would provide us with the partner who was best for us, at the right time, if we honoured Him.

She told us that most boys would respect us if we kept a dignified and restrained attitude towards them. But even in such cases, she warned us to keep boys at a distance and not allow them to become intimate with us, lest we fall into sin or into a commitment to marry, in a moment of weakness. She told us not even to consider any boy as a prospective marriage partner until we were at least 20 years old, when we would be a little more mature, spiritually and emotionally, to consider the matter soberly and wisely.

I was so thankful for all this good advice, because it kept me from doing anything foolish in my younger days.

CHAPTER SIX

PROBLEMS OF HOSTEL LIFE

All of us had several duties in the hostel, that we had to do in turns - gardening, helping in the kitchen and in the chapel, washing clothes and keeping the premises clean.

I used to complain about the food I got. But one day it dawned on me, like a revelation from heaven that it was wrong for a Christian to complain about anything. I realised that in fact I deserved nothing but Hell. Everything that I got that was better than Hell was the result of God's mercy. I realised that I must be prepared to eat anything that is set before me. I saw that even in matters of food, the Lord was testing me. I read in the gospels how Jesus fasted for 40 days and then defeated Satan.

Stealing was a very common practice in our hostel. I thought of my mother who used to pilfer small items from her office. I had then thought that that was not serious, because she was taking things from a government office and not from any individual. Now I knew that all stealing was wrong. I felt a compelling urge to write to Mummy and to tell her that all stealing was displeasing in God's sight. But I did not know whether Mummy could give up the habit, because I had seen that it was hard for older people to break with their bad habits once these habits had a grip on them.

This put a healthy fear in me and I decided to get rid of my bad habits in my youth itself, lest I too end up like them.

Some girls were very selfish and greedy with food and other things that were meant to be shared by everybody. This caused a problem for all of us. Some girls were moody, and constantly occupied with themselves. They were full of self-pity and never finished telling us their sad stories. It was true that many of them had been abused in their homes. But I told them that there was no need for them to live perpetually in their past. They could shake off their past with God's help, if they wanted to, and Jesus could help them forget their past, forgive those who had wronged them and reach great spiritual heights. I encouraged them to find a cure for their problem by seeking to help others. This would set them free from being occupied with themselves alone all the time.

I would get discouraged if I didn't get a letter from home when I was expecting one. But sometimes the letters that came from home would discourage me even more, because the news from home was usually bad.

The other thing that discouraged me was whenever I lost some small thing. I didn't know how to get over that. I asked the Lord to help me overcome my attachment to material things.

Some girls on the other hand, were so well off that they couldn't care less for their things or for the feelings of others.

I took part in whatever games were arranged in the hostel. I found that this was good for me. I saw that some girls who did not like any physical activity and did not even go for a walk became fat and got sick very often. I realised that our body being the temple of the Holy Spirit must be kept fit for His use at all times. I also saw that many eating habits that some of my friends had were actually harmful to our bodies. Overeating made some of the girls really fat and sluggish and ugly.

I noticed a tendency in me to seek the company of the popular girls and to make them my best friends. But as I began to think of what Jesus would have done, I saw that I must befriend the sad and lonely ones, and those who were not smart or capable. I longed to tell them of the Lord, Who calls all the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him to find rest in their souls.

Though I am neither pretty nor fair-skinned, I learned very soon to accept myself as God had made me. I knew that He had made no mistake in the way He had created me in my mother's womb. I was also certain that He had made no mistake in allowing me to be born into the particular family I was born in to. I was taken up with the thought that Jesus loved me so much as to consider me worth dying for! I could never get over this glorious truth.

I thought of others in the hostel who were more unfortunate than me. There was a girl who had been blinded in one eye by an accident. Another one had a large hairy mole on her face. Others had scars on their faces and were unhealthy in many ways, because of the improper food they had received in their childhood.

Some others were scarred in their minds by the physical and sexual abuse they had suffered from a young age. I really felt sorry for them. How could such a girl tell her ugly secrets to the one who would one day be proposed to her in marriage? I wondered: Would he refuse her when he heard that or would he put her away after marrying her? I didn't find an answer for that. All I could tell these girls was that Jesus knew their every sorrow and would enable them to triumph over the consequences of all the evil that others had done to them.

I knew that Jesus had come to untie every knot that Satan had tied in our lives (1 John 3:8). There were orphan children in the hostel who had never experienced love from anyone and who could never get close to anyone. I told them about the Friend Whom I had come to know Who would never let us down. I told them that we had to learn to cast even the burden of our past into the Lord's hands and leave it with Him. He alone was

able to wipe away every tear, heal every gaping wound and erase the memory of the past completely.

Another dangerous habit that I saw among some of the girls was their trying to make contact with Satanic powers. I saw some of them trying out palm-reading, getting their horoscopes read, going to fortune-tellers and believing what was written under the column, "What the Stars Foretell" in the newspapers. One or two of them even had ouija boards. I knew that these were wrong and warned them that they would unconsciously get in touch with Satan through all these practices and destroy themselves. I warned them that trying to get their problems solved through black magic and witchcraft would bring upon them greater problems than the ones they tried to solve.

Our warden was like a mother to us. She once arranged for a married lady to talk to all of us about sex. This lady taught us, using charts, how boys and girls were different and how our bodies functioned. This information was useful for us, because although we were curious about sexual matters, we were afraid to ask anyone. It was good to learn from a mature person how a male and female cell united to form a wonderful new baby.

Although I was very young, I found that life in the hostel matured me spiritually - and that too, very quickly - because I had the opportunity to help many different types of girls that were in our hostel.

It was only years later that I saw the verse that says that God waters those who water others (Prov.11:25).

God certainly watered me in many wonderful ways in those days.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINISHING SCHOOL

I wanted my parents also to know the Lord. I wanted my father to shoulder his domestic duties in a more responsible way. I wanted my parents to be happy together. I wanted my younger brother also to know the Lord. I did not know what I could do for all this. But I kept committing these matters daily to my Lord and left my anxieties with Him.

There was a chorus that we used to sing in the hostel:

*"Little by little and day by day,
Little by little in every way
My Jesus is changing me..."*

I saw it actually happening in my life. Little by little, the Lord took control of my anger and my moody nature and helped me to change.

I read books about being a disciple of Jesus and about being transformed into His likeness. Gradually that became my longing and my greatest desire - to become like Jesus.

I wrote down a list of all the qualities in my life that were not Christ-like and prayed about these regularly. I asked the Lord to change me and to replace my old, corrupt nature with His own nature. As time went on, the list of my weaknesses and my sins grew longer and longer! But I was happy and I trusted the Lord to do His part of changing me, as I did my part of surrendering everything to Him. I also started praying for others.

I read one day, in the Psalms, that a young girl could keep her way clean and her heart pure by paying close attention to God's Word (Psalm 119:9,11). I was so encouraged by these promises I discovered in the Bible, that I decided to try and read the whole Bible through in one year. Our warden had given us a Bible-reading scheme, which if we followed would enable us to finish the whole Bible in a year. I started with this scheme and made it my goal to read through the Bible. But I could not complete it in a year. I took me much longer. But I did finish it finally!

I also applied myself to my studies in school, because I wanted to earn my own living ultimately and not be a burden on anyone else. The routine of life in the hostel helped me to organise my time and made me more systematic in many ways.

There was ample opportunity to help others in many ways too. Once I completed my Higher Secondary (Standard 12) examinations and passed by God's grace, I had to leave the hostel.

That was indeed a sad day for me, because I had come to love the hostel and especially my warden who had been my guide for nearly 4 years.

My Higher Secondary marks were just average.

I talked with my warden about my future and she suggested that I study to be a nurse. I followed her advice and applied to a number of nursing schools. But one after the other, I got "Rejection" letters from all the good nursing schools in South India. I was disappointed. But I knew the Lord loved me and would open the right door for me, even if it was not in a prestigious school.

One day I got a letter offering me a seat for B.Sc. (Nursing) in a School of Nursing in North India. That was far away from my home. I had to think much as to whether to accept the offer or not. The school was located in a strange place. I knew no-one there. The language was different from mine and I didn't know Hindi too well.

All thoughts of the future brought many fears and apprehensions into my mind. Then I thought of one of my favourite songs:

*"All the way my Saviour leads me,
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy
Who through life has been my Guide!"*

I sought the advice of my warden once again. She said that God had closed all other doors and opened this one. So perhaps He had something good in store for me there in North India. Little did I know then how prophetic those words would be! I wrote to the Nursing School and accepted their offer.

At last my dreams of a career would materialise.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A NEW CAREER

My days in the Nursing School were very different from my schooldays.

I had a career ahead of me now. I met many different kinds of people. I was happy that there were some believers among the nurses who were members of a Nurses' Christian Union. I went for these meetings and we had many good times together singing, praying and listening to messages.

Some of the nursing students came from rich families and were very worldly. I could not afford many of the things they could. Thus I was protected from a lot of worldliness. What a blessing it was to come from an average middle-class home, where we had just enough for our earthly needs.

I enjoyed my studies. I had to learn Hindi and that was a challenge to me. I planned to graduate, study further and become a tutor.

In my anatomy classes, I came to understand a little bit of the wonderful way in which God created our bodies. I also saw how we misuse and abuse our bodies in so many ways. I discovered how the medical profession itself was being misused by many doctors in the hospital, to make money rather than to alleviate the suffering of the poor. I was disillusioned, because I had always considered the medical profession to be a noble one.

I also came across patients who had misused drugs on themselves (drug-addicts) and who came to be rehabilitated. Even in that remote place, the devil had caused havoc in many lives through drugs and alcohol.

I knew it was wrong to do abortions and to kill unborn babies. Some doctors even practised "euthanasia". That was new word for me. I learnt that it refers to killing people through medical means by not giving them proper treatment when they are sick. This was usually done to old and sick people who were a burden to the family. I was horrified to discover that such things went on in hospitals. My eyes were opened in the hospital to the wickedness of the medical world. Most of the doctors felt that they belonged to some superior caste of society compared to us nurses! But when I saw the wrong things that the doctors did, I was glad that I was only a nurse who had to obey orders and not a doctor who gave orders!

But I also hated the way some of the nurses themselves would shout at poor patients and bark out orders to their juniors. Some of those nurses were so proud that they treated all non-medical people as stupid and ignorant!! But sad to say, after a little while, I found myself behaving just like them. I had to repent and ask the Lord to help me to behave better with the patients. My ignorance of the language frustrated me and I often used that as an excuse for my rude behaviour. How subtle our human nature is - blaming something else rather than taking the blame ourselves.

But I realised that as a Christian girl, I must speak respectfully and be patient with the sick, the weak and the elderly. I had to seek God for grace to bear with the screaming infant, and to console the bereaved mother. One sees death every day in a hospital and it is easy to become callous and hard to the sufferings of others. I prayed that the Lord would give me a heart of compassion. I had many opportunities to do good to others and even to speak about the Lord to someone, occasionally.

There were defeats in my spiritual life too. There was no faithful warden to watch over my life here. It was easy to become indisciplined in my prayer-life. I slackened in my Bible-reading. It was more of a battle to be a true Christian here than in the Christian hostel where I had been earlier. But through those battles, I began to know the Lord personally.

There was a rich young man who was admitted as a patient in one of the rooms at one time. I began to like him and even wondered if he might ask me to marry him some day. I was so conceited. But he was soon discharged and I never saw him again. At times, when some handsome doctor would speak nicely to me or when I was assisting him in the operating theatre, I would imagine him as my future husband. Those were the daydreams I had!

Foolish me! My future was safe with Jesus. But I would often forget that. How unhappy I would have been if I had married that rich patient or that handsome doctor, neither of whom loved the Lord Whom I loved. Jesus was my Maker and my Husband until He Himself gave me an earthly husband, if that was His will. What was life worth without Him? If I ignored His laws, I might even end up as someone's second wife, like some women I had met.

I decided to let the Lord take care of my future. He had led me thus far and I could trust Him for the future too. He knew the longings of my heart. It was He Who had created those longings and He Himself would satisfy them in His own way and in His own time. I must wait. I must come to inward rest in this area of my life.

I saw how many of the nurses in the hostel had gone astray, deceived by the empty promises of some doctor or some para-medical worker. Many of them came to the Nursing School as innocent young girls and lost their virginity here. I was thankful for all that I had learnt of the Lord before I came here and that protected me.

The Lord reminded me often of the decisions I had made to be true to Him. Even though I had greater freedom here than in my former hostel, I found that my conscience bound me to stay within the ways of the Lord.

I also learned to live frugally and not to waste money on too many clothes or on fancy clothes. I found that I could save a little money from the stipend I received each month, to give for the Lord's work. I could even spare a little occasionally to help one or two poor patients to buy medicines.

Sometimes one of the nurses would come and borrow money from me and never return it. I would keep on hoping, month after month, that she would return the money. But she wouldn't. The Lord taught me to forgive her and also to be wise in future with money, since my money was not mine but His. I had to learn to say "No" to people who were irresponsible.

Some would borrow my sarees and when they returned them, I saw that the sarees were torn. This disturbed me. I realised then how much I loved material things. The Lord taught me to judge myself in such matters.

I also learned to cope with loneliness and not to look inward and get dejected. I had met some old ladies who always griped and complained and went around giving advice to others who did not want their advice. They were so boring that people detested them. I did not want to end up like them.

I decided to find my joy in the Lord, and sought to be constantly fresh in my spiritual life. I always kept before my eyes the example of my old friend and guide - the warden - who had found contentment in doing the work God gave her. How fortunate I had been to have had an example like that in my younger days. I kept in touch with her and sought her advice frequently and she always had a word in season for me.

CHAPTER NINE

GROWING IN WISDOM

I found a good Hindi-speaking church near the hospital.

It was a small congregation with some sincere Christians from the local area and the hospital. I disciplined myself to attend the meetings there regularly. By this time I had picked up enough Hindi to understand quite a bit of the sermons and even to sing some of the songs.

Although I still could not converse freely in Hindi, I found one or two good families in that church who bore with my poor language and who occasionally invited me over to their homes. I became a regular member of the church and found that I fitted in very well. Very soon I felt that I should obey the Lord in water-baptism.

I wrote home about my faith. But even Mummy ridiculed me. She wrote to me that she did not want me to become one of those "Hallelujah" types whom she despised. Many people in my hometown had had some bad experiences with pastors and Bible-women who went around visiting houses, praying long prayers, thrusting religion down people's throats and pressurising people to give them money for "God's work"!! I wished Mummy could see that I was different from them. I felt that only my life could speak to her and not my letters.

My baptism was a great event for me. It was as exciting a day for me as the day when the Lord had brought me into His fold, some years earlier. But it also marked the beginning of a lot of persecution and opposition for me. I discovered that all who follow the Lord and live godly lives will suffer persecution.

I wanted to learn how to conduct myself with modesty and dignity as a child of God. I wanted the people with whom I worked to know that I belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ. The world and its attractions had very little interest for me, after my baptism.

I met a lot of good people in the church. I soon discovered in myself a desire to talk to men - even married men - both in the hospital and in the church. At times I found that I preferred to talk to men even more than to women. But I quickly sensed that this was wrong and the Lord warned me to be careful. I saw that it was wrong of me to come between a man and his wife when God had united them together. I decided then that I would never talk freely with any married man if I was not equally free with his wife as well. This decision kept me from many pitfalls. I think it saved me from causing misunderstandings in the homes of many others too. I was thankful for the faithful way in which the Holy Spirit warned me on such occasions to avoid embarrassing situations.

I wondered at times if all girls felt the way I did. These wrong affections would bring a temporary delight in me, but they always left a bad taste afterwards. I was also afraid that this would become another giant in my life that would destroy me. I asked the Lord one day to root out every habit in my life that He was not happy with.

I also found ways in which I could serve the Lord. I volunteered to teach the children in the Sunday school class, and to baby-sit for one or two families, when they needed to go

out somewhere. I would also talk to some of the patients about the Lord. I discovered that it didn't take much to bring joy to people. A smile was enough to lighten up a sick person's face and a kind word was like a healing balm.

I had to be wise though not to allow people to take advantage of me. I found that there were some patients who took advantage of the kind nurses and made them run around for them as their slaves.

I found that many nurses had a tendency to give advice to one and all. They would talk like experts and act like matrons to others, until people got disgusted with them and would avoid them. Seeing this, I avoided giving people advice, because I knew I was young and inexperienced. I discovered that what many people wanted was someone who would give them a listening ear and not someone who gave them advice. So I developed the habit of listening to the problems of people. Thus I made many friends in every ward in the hospital.

The other problem I faced was with my fellow-nurses in the hostel. Most of them were interested only in gossiping and speaking evil of the hospital authorities. They would waste hours in such idle talk. It was very difficult for me to escape from them. But I would find some excuse and go away. I knew that I would have to give an account to the Lord one day for all my speech and for all the gossip I had given a listening ear to.

There were some nurses who were hypochondriacs. They were always imagining that they were sick and wanted the sympathy of others perpetually. I wondered how they would ever be able to get married and shoulder the responsibility of looking after a husband and children, if they were so occupied with themselves in their single days itself!!

These girls were so inconsiderate that they would thrust themselves on others without a thought of the inconvenience they were causing. I wondered at times if it was because they had seen so much sickness in the hospital that they imagined that they themselves had some of those diseases!!

One of the nurses however did get tuberculosis from a patient. She was very upset when she discovered how she had caught the disease. She was an unbeliever and was cursing the patient day and night. How different it is for us who are God's children. Nothing can happen to us without God's knowledge. And when we do get sick, thank God He can heal us too. Jesus is our Healer and our burden-bearer. He can heal us miraculously or lead us to a place where we can get the proper treatment for our sickness.

Some of my colleagues were movie-fans and always talked about their favourite movie-stars and sang movie songs in the hostel. I was thankful that I knew nothing of all this and thought of the hymn that said:

*"Take my voice and let me sing,
Always only for my King..."*

Some of them had ambitions to go to the Middle East countries where they had heard that other nurses had gone and made a lot of money and bought a lot of gold jewellery.

What did the Lord want me to do?

I wanted to help my family financially. But at the same time, I wanted to do the Lord's will too. I felt that if the Lord blessed the little that I had, it would be like the 5 loaves and 2 fishes that He had blessed on earth and fed 5000 people with.

I had heard of many believers who had gone abroad only to make money. I saw that money was a big snare. And any wealth amassed in a wrong way could become a curse for me and for my family.

I also thought of how my father drank at home and wasted all his money that way. We would have been a rich family, if it were not for his drinking habit. I saw that money was a sacred trust given to us by God and we were to use it wisely and frugally.

I was always busy and had very little spare time. And this was a very good thing. An idle mind is the devil's workshop. I tried to learn to sew and repair my own clothes in the little spare time I had, to keep myself occupied.

I loved my studies and my life was, generally speaking, a happy one. I had a sense of purpose and fulfilment in my life. I wanted to overcome all the setbacks of my childhood and put them behind me forever.

I found some good books in the church library. I saw an old copy of the biography of Madam Guyon there. I had never heard of her before. It was a big book and it took me many months to finish reading it, since I had very little time for reading. But it was one of the best books I ever read. It challenged me afresh to love the Lord with all my heart. It helped me in many different ways in my spiritual life - especially to understand the purpose of suffering and the way of the cross.

"To serve the Lord without any distraction" was now the motto I made for myself - and the inspiration of this motto drew me to follow the Lord.

CHAPTER TEN

LOOKING AHEAD

After I had finished my nursing studies I stayed on and worked in the same area of North India, because I saw the need for Christian nurses there.

I got a job in a primary health centre. We used to go to the villages regularly. Those visits were tiresome, but enjoyable. I was busy - every single day. I loved the people and I loved to tell them about the Lord.

I was able to send some money home each month as a token of my gratitude to my parents. I could give a little money for the Lord's work in North India. And I also managed to save a little money for a rainy day - or for my wedding!

I did my own cooking, washed my own clothes and thus saved a lot on my personal expenses. Our nurses' uniform, which I wore most of the time, helped me not to worry about the latest fashions.

Daddy now tried to enter my life again. He had never bothered about me all these years. But now that I had graduated and was earning, he wanted me to go abroad and had started making enquiries with different families for my marriage. He wrote to me that he had stopped drinking - and Mummy confirmed this. That was an answer to my prayers.

I really loved Daddy. So I never wanted to hurt him. But I realised that having put my hand to the plough, if I looked back now, I would not be worthy of my Lord (Luke 9:62). I decided that no relative would ever be more important to me than Jesus Himself.

I started praying about my future. I wanted the Lord's guidance in the matter of my marriage. I remembered the verses I had read in the Bible like, "How can two walk together unless they are agreed? What fellowship has light with darkness.....Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers..." etc., The meaning of those words from the Bible was very clear: A believer must never marry an unbeliever.

I was determined not to allow my marriage to be filled with quarrels like my mother's had been. The Lord would help me. I knew that the Bible taught that I should submit to my husband. But I was determined that I would never allow my children to suffer as I had suffered.

But how could I get my parents to understand these important truths?

I decided that I would follow the Lord - one step at a time - at all costs.

I decided that I would rather remain single all my life than marry an unbeliever. I just did not want to be linked for my whole life with a person whom God had not chosen for me. And I was prepared to stand against both of my parents on this matter - graciously but firmly!

My role models were not worldly women but the godly women I had read about in the Scriptures and in biographies - women like Sarah, Ruth and Priscilla in the Bible, and Susannah Wesley, Betty Stam and Elisabeth Elliot in recent times.

I had once taken some Bible studies for our nurses' prayer fellowship on women in the Bible and also shared with them the life-stories of these godly women. So the examples of these women were fresh in my mind.

Deborah was such a brave woman that God could use her, like He used Moses, to liberate the Israelites from their enemies. Esther was a girl who had taken a stand for God and become a blessing to the people of God in her generation.

Mary the mother of Jesus was an outstanding example of one who submitted to God, even when she faced the prospect of ridicule and misunderstanding. Martha and Mary had opened their home and their hearts to the Lord and experienced a mighty miracle in their home.

Lydia, Dorcas, Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, were others whom I had set before my eyes.

I had also taken warning from the bad examples mentioned in the Bible, like Eve, Lot's wife, Job's wife, Moses' wife and Jezebel.

After some years had gone by and no suitable proposals came for me, I accepted the prospect of remaining single all my life.

The longing for security was very strong in me, like it is in all young women. But I wanted to be happy in the Lord first of all and to please Him above all things. I wanted to be ready for His coming, without having disobeyed Him in this important step of marriage. I could always work as a nurse and support God's work in different places. There was a dignity about my life now and a sense of worth.

I had no more daydreams. I wanted to please the Lord alone - come what may.

My boss was the medical superintendent of the whole hospital. I kept a dignified attitude with him and we got along fine.

As I mentioned earlier, I saw how many nurses moved very freely with doctors - even with those who were married. Those nurses didn't seem to care that their foolish, flirtatious behaviour could wreck many a family. I never wanted to be guilty of such a sin.

We had a TV in our nurses hostel. But the emptiness of most of the TV programmes made me realise what a tremendous waste of time it was to watch them. A few programmes were informative and I would watch these occasionally. But I always lived in fear that I would get addicted to television and thus lose out spiritually. I realised later, that it was this fear, that had been instilled in me by my good friend the warden, that preserved me from such an addiction.

I found great joy in getting to know people in the church and helping some of them who came to the clinic. I loved those simple people and I felt they loved me too.

Thus the days grew into months and the months into years.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

We once had a study on John Bunyan's "Pilgrims Progress" in the church. That brought a revival among many of us. We began to take our Christian lives more seriously thereafter. I wanted to be faithful in following Jesus - just like Christian in that story - until the end of my life.

We used to have special meetings in our church at times. I attended all such meetings, because I wanted to have a continuous revival in my life.

On one such occasion I became especially aware of the dryness in my life. In addition, the long hot summers in North India used to depress me terribly. I now felt the need to seek the Lord in a fresh way.

The Lord met with me and blessed me quite unexpectedly. One day when I was praying alone in my room, I suddenly felt waves of joy flow over my whole being and I began to utter strange syllables with my tongue. I realised then that Jesus had baptized me in His Holy Spirit and that what I was saying in prayer was in a language I could not understand. It was "the gift of tongues". I had heard people speak about this experience, but I never knew much about it.

I was overjoyed and thrilled.

I never realised that God had such a blessing for a wretch like me. The baptism in the Spirit brought a great release in my spirit and an intense love for the Lord. I felt as if my life had been transported up to heaven itself. I lived in the light of that glory for a number of days thereafter.

During all those days, I gave expression to the unspoken longings of my heart through this new language that the Lord had given me. I could not understand what I was saying, but it was like a secret love-language between me and the Lord. I was certain that the Lord understood every word, for it came straight from my heart. And it brought spiritual healing too - like a soothing balm in my innermost being.

The Holy Spirit brought freshness into my life too - like a spring of water springing up from within me continually. I somehow felt this spring would never dry up, like other

earthly springs of joy, but would keep on flowing from within me until the end of my life, in greater and greater measure. I believed God for that.

I realised that what I had experienced was the same experience that the first disciples had received on the day of Pentecost, that had transformed them from frightened cowards into bold witnesses for the Lord. I realised too that this experience was not something for me to testify about in a boastful way, but something to be humbly used for the glory of God alone.

I had not studied the Bible deeply. So I could not explain the Biblical basis for this experience, even to myself. All I knew was that I hungered and thirsted for God and He met with me and rivers of living water began to flow out from my innermost being, as Jesus had promised (John 7:37-39).

The baptism of the Spirit brought an altogether new dimension into my Christian life and a greater hunger for God and His Word.

After this experience, it was not difficult for me to share my faith with others around me. My timidity was gone.

The new language I received remains with me even today, bringing freshness into my prayer-life. I find it to be of great help when I am under pressure and when I am tempted to be discouraged.

I was thankful that God had met with me in this way before I got married.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A YOUNG MAN!

One day our pastor came to see me, along with his wife, and asked me whether I was thinking of getting married and if so, whether I would be interested in considering a young man from the church as a possible life-partner. His name was Prakash and he was working as a technician in an electronics company. He was a good Christian who had surmounted many obstacles to get a good education.

There were many factors to be considered in this proposal - both positive and negative. He and I were from different communities and our mother-tongues were different. I wanted to marry someone with whom I could speak freely in a common language. Communication was, for me, a very important part of married life. So I was glad to know that he spoke English well.

Prakash had a good testimony in the church, and from the little I had seen of him in the meetings, where he led the singing, I felt I could look up to him spiritually. This was a very important factor for me. I had seen many Christian wives who had great difficulty in their marriages because they could not look up to their husbands spiritually. I also sensed that Prakash and I had one important thing in common - our love for the Lord.

But I did not want to take a decision too quickly. So I told the pastor I would pray about it. I was excited. But I did not want my excitement to run away with me. I fasted and prayed one day and asked the Lord to show me His will clearly; and then I continued to pray about the matter each day.

Prakash was living with his parents, being their only son. I knew that if I married him I would possibly have to live with them. I was willing for anything. All I wanted to know was the will of my Heavenly Father. I put away all the plans I had made to live a life of comfort and luxury. I decided that if I married him, I would respect his parents just as I respected my own.

I longed to have a home and a family and that thought cheered me. But it was not a life of comfort that loomed ahead of me. A new culture, a person from a different community and a life with my parents-in-law lay ahead of me. But it would be a life of happiness, for Prakash and I loved the Lord. That was what comforted me the most.

I thought of Ruth, a girl in the Bible who had left her people and married someone outside her own culture and race. She remained true to her husband and to his people. She started life as a poor woman. But God blessed her and even though she was from the Moabite race - a race that originated in incest (Gen.19:30-37) and that was not permitted to enter the assembly of the Lord (Deut.23:3) - yet she became the great-grandmother of King David.

Two books I read at that time helped me a great deal in finding God's will. They were SEX, LOVE AND MARRIAGE (The Christian Approach) and FINDING GOD'S WILL (both by Zac Poonen). These books taught me to look at marriage from God's viewpoint. The first book also helped me to see what I should look for in a possible life-partner. Then I asked the pastor for more information about Prakash and his family.

I also wrote to my parents about this proposal. But I knew that they would not be happy with it. They wanted me to marry someone who was rich or who was working abroad and making lots of money. And if I was not willing for that, they possibly wanted me to remain single all my life and support them. I wrote to them respectfully and asked them whether they would be more interested in my being happy or in my making a lot of money. I sent the letter with much prayer that God would change their mind.

The thought of becoming somebody's wife overwhelmed me, at times. I was even a bit afraid. I was considering a very serious step that would change my entire way of life. I was going to share my lot with another person. It was not like having a new room-mate in my hostel. If she was difficult, I could always ignore her or change my room. But I could

never do that with a husband! I prayed fervently that I might not miss the will of God. I also prayed that if I were making a mistake, the Lord would somehow stop this proposal at this stage itself. I wanted to be in the centre of God's will. I did not want to have an unhappy marriage as my mother had had.

After a couple of months of daily, fervent prayer, I felt a peace in my spirit about this proposal. This I knew was God's way of indicating to me that this was indeed His will for me. I told my pastor about it. The very next day I got a letter from my parents giving their approval for my marriage. How perfect was God's timing!

They had apparently made some enquiries (without my knowledge) about Prakash from some friends of theirs (who were working in a town near where I was working), and had obtained a good report about him.

The pastor announced our engagement in the church-service one day. Prakash and I thereafter met each other in the visitor's room of our hostel and got to know each other a little better. I found a growing love for Prakash within me and sensed that this was reciprocated, even though we did not express it freely to each other, due to the reticence and reservations of our Indian culture!

How good God had been to me and how wonderfully He had led me to the one He had chosen for me. Although in my younger days I had foolishly fantasized in my mind about being in love with other men, the Lord had kept me, by His grace, from wasting my affections on anyone else. But even if I had made such a mistake and fallen, I knew that my loving Saviour would have forgiven me, blotted out my sins and helped me to start afresh. God gives all of us many chances even after we have failed, and helps us to forget our past completely.

I wrote about my engagement to my warden-friend, whose advice and prayers had kept me all these years. In typical, Christlike fashion, she replied that she shared my joy - even though she herself was still single.

When I thought of all that God had done for me in this matter, at a time when I had given up all hope of getting married and my parents too were unable to help me, I was reminded of the words of Mary who said, "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour, for He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant, for the Mighty One has done great things for me" (Lk.1:47-49).

Prakash and I used to meet twice a week and I looked forward to every visit of his. I could see that he loved the Lord deeply, and this, more than anything else, made me secure. I waited eagerly for the day when I would be his bride. And we made plans for our life together. We concluded each visit with prayer, acknowledging the Lord Jesus as Lord of our lives.

My days were full of sunshine now!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN

We fixed a date for our wedding. My parents came a few days earlier. They were impressed by Prakash's character. I could see that God had brought about a real change in their attitude. When we honour God, He honours us too.

Our wedding was a very simple one, because neither of us had much money to spare for a grand function. I know couples who began their married life in debt, just because they wanted to have a grand wedding-reception.

Prakash and I had agreed that we would never get into debt at any time in our lives. So we invited just a few of Prakash's relatives, the members of our church and some of my friends from the hospital, for the reception. Of course, my warden-friend was also there.

Both Prakash and I gave a brief testimony at the wedding as to what the Lord meant to us. This was unusual - for it is not normal for the bridegroom and bride to give a testimony at their wedding. But both of us felt that it would be a good opportunity to share our faith with our unconverted relatives and friends who had come to the wedding and who may never get another chance to hear the gospel.

The pastor gave us some very good advice in his message. I listened very carefully and still remember almost every word he spoke.

He said that marriage was like a garden. The husband and wife are the gardeners. The Head Gardener was the Lord Jesus Whose instructions we had to follow closely, if we wanted a beautiful garden. In such a garden, the Lord Himself would come and walk with us and talk with us as He did in Eden. He said that we must avoid all rudeness of speech and destructive criticism of each other. We must cultivate a pleasant way of talking to each other and never speak in an irritated way. Whenever we find irritation cropping up, we were to pluck out that nasty weed immediately, cast it out and plant a seed of love immediately in its place.

Other weeds we were to look out for were, accusing one another, an unforgiving spirit, moodiness, comparing our partner with others, reminding one another of our past failures or of our past friendships with the opposite sex, keeping grudges and resentments etc.,

He went on to say that we must not expect our partner to do things the way we were used to doing them. We must be prepared to accept each other just as he or she is. Suspicion too, he reminded us, was a very dangerous weed. It was related to jealousy - and both were very poisonous weeds that easily found root in any garden that was neglected. Even the root of these weeds should be taken out as soon as they begin to appear.

Some poisonous weeds, like suspicion, he went on to say, were planted by the devil and if we were not watchful, they would grow very quickly and destroy both us and our marriage. Fear and discouragement could grow into gigantic trees that would easily crush the little plants in the garden. These too were to be pulled out at the root-stage itself.

As the pastor was speaking about fear, I remembered what I had read in a book titled "*Hind's feet in High Places*" (by *Hannah Hurnard*), about a crippled girl named "*Much Afraid*" whom the Lord transformed into a bold, courageous girl. In *Pilgrim's Progress* too, I had read about Giant Despair who imprisoned Christian and almost put him to death.

Discontentment, the pastor said, was another poisonous plant that produced the fruits of grumbling, complaining and nagging. (Nagging, he said humorously, was like having a bad stomach-upset in which the diarrhoea never stopped!!) If we were not watchful to root out these evils, they would wreak havoc and destruction not only in our lives but in the lives of others too.

He went on to speak of discontented people who had got into debt in order to purchase things that were beyond their means. Many finally committed suicide, when their debts became huge, and left their children fatherless. The pastor warned us that those who loved this world would find this plant of discontentment springing up everywhere in their gardens.

Speaking ill of others and gossiping were also plants that could infect our children and therefore should never be allowed in our garden. Wanting to win an argument or wanting to have the last word were also obnoxious plants that would make our entire garden stink.

He urged us to fellowship with people who wanted to plant good plants and to avoid all those who bring weeds and garbage (gossiping and evil speaking) into our garden.

Some of the good plants we could plant in our garden to replace the weeds were: Readiness to forgive one another, consideration for each other's feelings, sharing all earthly things with each other, sharing each other's views without arguing, daily Bible-reading and prayer, fellowshipping regularly with other Christians, and even cleanliness.

Such plants needed to be nurtured carefully if they were to grow into strong, healthy trees. The words we spoke to each other would be like the water that made these plants to grow. If our words were angry, it would be like pouring boiling, hot water on the plants. That would destroy them.

He read from Psalm 12:6, where the Lord's words are compared to silver refined seven times in a furnace. Our words he said, must be like that too - words that are refined and kind.

Good trees, he said, would take many years to grow. But once they start yielding fruit, many can be blessed by their nourishing fruit; and their leaves would bring healing to

many too. He also quoted a verse that said that a kind reply could turn away another's anger (Prov.15:1).

An essential plant that must be found in our garden, the pastor said, was the plant of "Judging oneself". This plant does not grow in open places but only in the shade, hidden from the eyes of men. It is so tender a plant that if we don't nurture it carefully, every day, it will wither away. This is a plant that does not look very attractive. But it has such a powerful and pleasing aroma about it, that it could spread its beautiful scent over every part of our garden.

If we do not judge ourselves, the garden of our personal life and our married life could end up as one full of man-made plastic flowers - that looked nice before men, but were without any life. He warned us that many a marriage-garden was actually filled with plastic flowers that fooled people but did not fool God.

There were many who judged others, but few who judged themselves. Those who did not judge themselves would face a terrible judgment from the Lord when He returned to earth to judge all men. The pastor stressed that "being always ready to forgive one another and to ask forgiveness from one another" were fundamental requirements for a good garden.

For the wife, he said, submission was a tender plant that was most essential and extremely valuable. We all have a strong will and must be willing to give it up as Jesus did, who said, "Not My will but Thine be done". And God's will for wives was that they should be subject to their husbands, even as the church is to Christ.

Brokenness of spirit was like the sweet perfume that filled the whole of Mary's house when she broke the alabaster vial and anointed the feet of Jesus. God is near all those who are broken in spirit (Psa.34:18).

At my wedding, I thought of many of my friends who had made hasty decisions and rushed into marriage, after a blinding love-affair, and others who had been enticed by the thought of worldly gain and prestige.

I thought of many believing nurses who had married unbelievers merely to please their parents, or because they wanted to go to the U.S.A. or to some Middle East country to make money.

I was so grateful that the Lord had preserved me from such a fate. It was not my faithfulness that had preserved me, but the Lord's mercy. Although I loved my single days, when I could live an independent life, I was happy to get married. I look forward to living a life for the Lord now as a submissive wife to Prakash. I want to make a success of my marriage and show the world what God can do for other sinners like me.

I want to be a helper to Prakash and not a hindrance. I want our life to be harmonious in every way.

I know that as I go forward, if I remain humble, the Lord will help me in every situation. I want to love Prakash's parents and to be good to them and to all who are dear to him.

I know that if I sow my seeds in peace, I can expect a bountiful harvest of peace and righteousness in due course (James 3:18).

I praise God for all His bountiful gifts in my life. Many years ago, He had promised me from Isaiah 58:11 that my life would be like a watered garden and like a spring of water that never failed - for God Himself would be the source of my supply. Now I see God beginning to fulfil that promise.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HEIRS TOGETHER

Although I longed to have a home of my very own, the Lord has not seen fit to grant me one so far. Out of necessity, we have had to live with Prakash's parents. But Prakash and I are still "heirs together of the grace of life". So we are a royal couple!! And above all, we are happy in the Lord!

I have learnt to respect Prakash's parents and accept them as my own. They have been good to me. And on my part, I have learnt to do things their way. I have also learnt many practical things from them. I knew that I could learn much from them if I maintained a humble, teachable attitude. The Lord told me never to compare them with my parents, but to accept them just as they are. Then they in turn would accept me too, as their own child.

I took certain decisions, as soon as I moved into my new home:

- I would not resent it, if Prakash's parents wanted to spend time with him at any time, since he was their son.

- I would never do or say anything that would bring a distance between him and his parents.

- I would leave it to Prakash to decide when to draw the lines of separation between him and his parents (as the Bible taught in Genesis 2:24). I would not be a busybody in his matters.

One day, we heard of a small girl in a nearby slum whose parents were so poor that they were going to sell her off. This appeared to be a common practice in those parts of North India, because many parents were extremely poor. We quickly went to them and asked if we could keep their daughter with us, so that she would not have to be sold. Since we were living nearby, she could go and visit her parents every weekend too. They gladly

agreed. I now had someone to talk to and to teach God's ways. We also arranged to send her to a nearby school. I found an opportunity now to show kindness to one whose earthly lot was miserable, and thus repay the kindness others had shown to me in my younger days.

Jesus came into the world to become the servant of all men. I too want to be like my Lord - a servant to all who came across my path, and especially to the poor and the needy.

I have tried to be a good companion to Prakash and to adapt my routine to his. Though our views are different on some matters, they blend together more and more as the days go by - like the colours in the rainbow. This makes our life together grow richer and more meaningful.

Often I find it boring doing the household chores such as cooking, washing and cleaning up the house. But I remind myself of what Brother Lawrence said in one of his books that he could feel the presence of God just as much when washing the vessels in the kitchen as when he was on his knees at the Lord's table, partaking of the bread and the cup. I want it to be like that for me too. Singing praises to God lightens every load.

I find that I still need to seek for God's grace to overcome my moodiness and stubbornness, my nagging of Prakash and many other habits in me that are un-Christlike. I want to be a wife who is like a crown to her husband, one whom he can safely trust in at all times (Prov.12:4; 31:11).

These words, "That was my fault. I am sorry. Please forgive me" are the words that have brought healing again and again in many a situation that could otherwise have brought tension or an explosion between us.

I have learnt that one big secret of a happy marriage is to appreciate each other and be thankful for each other. Then there can be no room for any unpleasantness or misunderstanding.

How fortunate the girl is who knows the Lord as her intimate Friend and Guide. Such a girl will lack nothing in life, whether she is married or single.

Godliness with contentment is great gain - and that means to be content with whatever lot God has appointed for us in life.

It may be that I will never have the home of my own that I longed for, but will have to stay with my husband's parents all my life. I shall be content.

It may be that I will have to continue working as a nurse to help my family. I shall be content.

Or perhaps I will have to stop working one day, when the Lord gives me a child and I become a full-time mother. I shall be content.

I am prepared for whatever the Lord has chosen to send across my path, for He is the One Who chooses all things for me now.

I want to be like the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31, who has the law of kindness on her tongue, and who faces the future with confidence in her Lord. That is one chapter in the Bible that

I meditate on, often.

Another verse that the Lord has often reminded me of, after I got married, is Psalm 45:10. There it tells me "to forget my father's house" now that I am married. Rebecca was not attached to her people after she married Isaac. As I had once set my hand to the plough when I chose the Lord Jesus as my Lord and Saviour and never looked back, even so, when I chose a husband as my earthly head, I had set my hand to another plough and I didn't ever want to look back. Lot's wife looked back and destroyed herself. I didn't want to make the same mistake. I could visit my parents and my family-members. But my attachment was to be to my husband alone henceforth.

I had many wrong ideas about sex. When I was single, I had thought that all sexual activity was wrong. Now, as a married woman, I realize that it is wrong only outside of marriage. I saw in the Scriptures that the sexual relationship was not just for the purpose of having children, but a duty that a husband and wife had to fulfil towards each other, except when they mutually agreed to abstain (1 Cor.7:3-5). I saw that God had created the sexual function even before man had sinned as one way in which a husband and wife could express their love for one another (Gen.1:28).

Now that I am married, I find that I have to be more disciplined, if I am to find time to read the Bible and pray and thus maintain a close walk with the Lord - because that has to be fitted in to my busy daily schedule.

I find the late nights to be a good time, when I have finished all my work, to come beside the still waters and to talk to the Shepherd of my soul, before going to bed. In His presence, I find true happiness as I unburden my soul before Him. There I am renewed with joy that is pure and heavenly. There no sin can have power over me. There I find pleasures that are eternal.

I have now experienced a little bit of the reality of what I used to sing to myself for many years:

*"There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God -
A place where sin cannot molest - near to the heart of
God."*

In one sense I am always in the presence of the Lord and my heart is frequently lifted up in praise to the Lord Who has done such wonderful things for me.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The local church has been our "heart-throb"!! We have come to see the family of God as our real family.

I was thankful to see that Prakash held exactly the same views as I did on this vital matter. I could see that Jesus had separated me from my earthly family and brought me into His family.

We were only a small group of about 60 believers in the church there. But we loved one another, we helped each other and cared for one another. I could see that this was the way God wanted His church to be.

Such an atmosphere being found in the church was largely due to the labours of the pastor who was a selfless man, who had had a clear call from God to serve Him. I had seen many dead churches in my life. Now I saw the reason: A church ultimately becomes like its leader.

Prakash and I took part in the Sunday morning meeting and the midweek Bible-study meeting, regularly. I tried my best to adjust my duty-timings with other nurses so that I did not miss either of these two meetings.

The times of praise and singing on Sunday mornings were really lively in our church and lifted my spirit every time. I also took notes regularly in the Bible-study meetings so that I could go over those verses of Scripture in my leisure time and also share whatever profited me, with other nurses. I found a hunger in my heart to study the Word of God.

I meditated on what the Scriptures taught about a woman's place in the church (1 Tim.2:9-15; 1 Cor.14:34-38). I saw clearly that the Bible taught that men should be the leaders in the church. I wanted to obey God's Word in the smallest matter and I was happy to submit to my husband and to the elder brothers in the church and to pray for them in their ministries.

I saw that as a lady, my calling in the church was to avoid the limelight and be a helper, behind the scenes. I taught the children in the Sunday School and shared the Word in the sisters' meetings and in the nurses' meetings.

The scarf that I wore to cover my head in the meetings was more than just a tradition for me. It symbolised for me my God-appointed place of submission to my husband and to the men to whom God had placed in leadership in the church (1 Cor.11:3-16).

I found that as I took that place of submission as a sister, joyfully, my service for God in the ministries that I was engaged in, became abundantly fruitful. I sensed a rich anointing of God in teaching the children and in sharing the word with the sisters.

Submission, I discovered, was an attitude in my spirit and not just an external thing. I saw it as the very spirit of the Lord Jesus Who submitted to His Father all through His earthly life. When this spirit permeates our whole being, God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others.

I also saw rebellion as the very spirit of Satan. If I was going to be a wise wife, I could build my home, by submitting to my husband - even as the church is subject to Christ, in everything (Eph.5:24; Prov.14:1).

Both Prakash and I felt that we should give regularly to the work of the Lord. We were not bound by any law in this matter neither did we feel compelled to do so. We gave cheerfully. We gave some money as offerings in the church. We also sent some money each month to two missionary organizations that had men and women working for the Lord in North India. We also prayed regularly for the Lord's servants whom we knew.

We never lacked anything in our home, because as we gave to God, He made what was left, to be more than adequate to meet our every need at home. Thus we proved the faithfulness of the Lord again and again.

The local church was an integral part of Prakash's life and mine. The church was the Body of Christ, of which we were a vital part. Fellowship with the saints there enriched our lives in many ways.

We prayed with God's people, whenever we faced any problems. We also helped others who faced pressures and trials in their lives. I saw that God allowed many trials in our lives as His children in order to unite us more closely to each other as members of Christ's Body. I feel sorry for those who do not have a good local church that they can fellowship in, and also for those who do not value the fellowship they have in their local church.

Prakash and I can honestly say that we have tasted something of heaven in the fellowship of the brothers and sisters in our church.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LOOKING BACK

Looking back over my past life, I find myself full of thankfulness to my Lord and my Redeemer for all that He has done for me.

He has made me who was once an insecure girl, now a daughter of God and a possessor of perfect earthly security as well as eternal security in heaven.

Living with Prakash and his parents, these past few months, has taught me a great deal. As I have already told you, I never enjoyed a happy home atmosphere in my childhood days. Now I can see how living in a happy home is far better than living in a hostel.

In a home, one has to learn to give and take. Living together, we rub each other more often and then it is easier to get irritated with each other. I have had to learn to forgive, as well as to ask forgiveness, again and again. I also had to learn how to address those older than me by their proper, respectful titles in Hindi.

I had to learn how to share everything I owned, with everyone in the home. I had to learn how to receive an unexpected guest whom Prakash suddenly brought home, and how to miss my meal in order to set something before him!

I also decided that everyone in the home would get an equal share of all the dishes I cooked - especially the good ones. I never took a special helping for myself. But if it was Prakash's favourite dish, I would give him a sample to taste in advance - because he always complimented my cooking!!

I had to learn how to stay up at night, to care for a sick parent, at times. I have had to learn how to adjust with others who are different from me.

But in spite of all this, I still prefer living with Prakash (even in a home that is not fully my own) than living anywhere else.

The main thing I am learning is to "do everything in love". Then even when I make mistakes, they are not serious in God's eyes.

I have come to admire Prakash. He is very hardworking and he loves the Lord and he loves me. So we are both supremely happy. We go for a walk every evening and share our day's experiences with each other. I look forward to that, every day!

At times, we have arguments - like all married couples. But we have tried to keep them from getting out of control. I know that God has called me to be a helper to Prakash and not just a "Yes-woman". That's why I tell him my opinion quite frankly. But having given him my opinion and the reasons for it, I then leave it to him to decide whether to accept it or not.

I can see how different I am from him. The little things that bother me so much don't seem to bother him at all. This may be because I am a woman and he is a man!

We tease each other and laugh together often! When we can do that without hurting or humiliating each other, then we know that our relationship is really healthy! Our life together has actually been great fun!

One day I sat down and made a list of all the things that were specifically my own problems and asked God how I could cope with them.

I was lonely and homesick frequently - ever since the day I first left home. These bouts of loneliness and homesickness would usually appear whenever something upset the regular daily routine of my life. But as I came to know God more and more as my Father and Mother and Friend and learnt to tell Him all my feelings and asked for His help, I found I was able to handle my loneliness.

I was very fearful. I was afraid of the dark, afraid of people, afraid to face the future and afraid of many other things. I was even afraid I might die, when I worked as a nurse attending on patients who had deadly diseases. Then one day I saw how many times God spoke the words "FEAR NOT" in Old Testament times to the men He loved and how often Jesus said the same words to His beloved disciples. I saw these words both as a command as well as a word of comfort from a loving Father and Friend. I keep reminding myself of that again and again. The Lord drives away my fears, either as soon as they come, or after I have struggled with them for a while.

I also had a bad habit of crying for no reason at all or because of some silly matter. I see now that such weeping was the result of self-pity. The Lord assured me that He would wipe away every tear of mine. I thought much about a song that I had learnt in the hostel, when I was a schoolgirl:

*"He [Jesus] had no tears for His own griefs,
But sweat drops of blood for mine."*

Over the years He has helped me to get over this habit of "crying" too and to be more concerned about the sorrows of others.

Insecurity was another big giant in my life and manifested itself in many different ways. It made me very possessive of my friends and my property! I wanted desperately to be loved by others, and even resented it if my friends loved others. I wanted their friendship exclusively for myself. I saw this attitude in me, even when I was in the hostel. I knew that this attitude was wrong, but I could do nothing about it.

After I was married, I found the same possessive attitude towards Prakash. I could not tolerate even his relatives being close to him. I would justify that saying that Prakash was now mine. But I have come to see that my attitude was wrong. How could I expect my husband's mother to stop loving her son just because he married me? I enjoyed others showering their love on me. How selfish it was of me then not to allow Prakash to enjoy the love of his own relatives. Perhaps this was another of those traits found in women, that I had to overcome, as a child of God.

I also saw a great craze in me to buy things. I thought Prakash would not like me spending a lot of money or that he might not see the need to buy something which I felt was necessary. So I would at times buy things without consulting him. But being naive

and simple, I was often cheated by the people of that town. Then I realised that it was better to do my shopping along with Prakash and buy any expensive item only with him.

At times, I hoped he would buy me some clothes of the latest fashion. But I saw that such cravings were born from a desire to impress people, and I repented of it. I had to put away worldliness and to stop hankering after worldly fashions. I also needed to learn how to share what I had with others poorer than me. Then God would give me all that I needed - even if I didn't get all that I wanted.

Sometimes I would retain an anger towards my mother-in-law and would not talk to her for a long time. I resented her advising me and her critical comments. My silence was my way of taking revenge. I now realise that such silence can at times be even worse than an outburst of anger. I asked the Lord to help me overcome this sinful habit. I saw that it was when I was careless in my daily walk with the Lord that I fell. When I realised my sin, I would ask the Lord to forgive me and ask my mother-in-law to forgive me as well.

As an offshoot of my insecurity and my possessive nature I found that I was jealous of other women who talked to Prakash. I knew very well that he was not interested in anyone other than me. No-one could be more faithful than he was. Yet my possessiveness made me jealous. The Lord taught me that it was wrong to accuse Prakash in this way or to be suspicious of him, and thus make life difficult for him.

Perhaps it was because I had known that my own father had been unfaithful to Mummy, that I reacted in this way. Or perhaps, this is how all women are!

But then I thought of how often I myself had to talk to many men, in my work in the hospital. What was wrong with that? I realised then that it was my attitude that needed changing. How patient Prakash had been with me!

I remembered the advice my mother had got from the lady we had visited when I was a small girl. She had told Mummy that even if her husband was unfaithful to her, she must forgive him and show him so much love that he would be drawn to her by the power of that love, just as iron filings are drawn to a magnet. Thus a wise wife could keep her husband from many pitfalls.

One day a man was admitted into our hospital who was dying of cancer. I heard that, while he was working in another city away from his family, he had fallen into sin and had had a child through a woman there. His wife, who was a true believer, brought him to our hospital and cared for him until he died. I discovered that she later befriended the woman her husband had sinned with. She even adopted the little child born to that woman and brought it up as her own. She told others that she loved the child because it was her husband's offspring! Only Christ could have done such a miracle as this - to make a human being so loving and forgiving.

Such examples challenge me to be a loving wife to my husband too. I have learnt that the greatest need in marriage is to endure in love until the end. Love covers a husband's

shortcomings and failures, overlooks his mistakes and does not bring to mind his past sins. Every time I read the love chapter (1 Corinthians 13), I feel I am miserably short of God's standard and realise that I have a long way to go.

The only light that shines in the darkness of this world is the unchanging love of God. God has loved me so greatly. Thus He has placed me in debt to all around me, to share His love with others who come across my path.

Love, I saw, was the greatest thing in the Christian life. But my human love was totally unreliable. I saw the need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, so that my heart could be filled with the love of God.

I know that God, Who did not spare His own Son for me will also with Him freely give me ALL THINGS - all through my life.

What a wonderful salvation I have received.

I was an outcast from my earliest days, but I have now found such grace from the Lord that I wonder at times if there is anyone happier than me, in the whole world. Some of you may wonder how I could possibly be so happy, when I am living with my husband's parents, with no home that I can call my own. It is only because I have found my happiness in the Lord and not in my circumstances. "Godliness with contentment is great gain".

I've met many Christians who never seem to be happy and I know the reason now. They have unsatisfied earthly longings. They feel they must have one thing or another, and cannot do without it. Thus they become restless.

I remember vividly what I told the Lord on the day I was baptized in the Holy Spirit: "From now on, I will desire nothing on earth but Thee, Lord Jesus" (Psalm 73:25). I check my heart frequently to see if I have kept my word. When I find that I have backslidden, I repent and renew my promise to love the Lord with all my heart.

Thus far, the Lord has preserved me. I believe He will preserve me in this devotion to Him until the end of my life.

My experience has been according to my name. I have found "grace upon grace".

I want to give all glory and honour to the Lord Jesus.

*"Jesus my Lord, I bow in full surrender,
For Thou hast purchased me on Calvary;
Now I am Thine, and Thine alone forever,
And Thou my portion for eternity."*
