

Chapter 22

God's Broken Heart

Little did we realise as we enjoyed the fellowship of so many friends on board the M/V Anastasis, that the Lord was again going before us preparing the next step of our growing experience of His leading in our lives. We certainly were happy to be associated with the ship's crew but we had no anticipation or hope that one day, we would be part of that family. Indeed, even though Anne had often said how much she would like a 'house by the sea', I little dreamed that, one day, she would have a 'home on the sea'! I'm sure that if I had even suggested such a thing to her when the ship was in Victoria, I would have heard a very loud "No way!" First however, God had to do something more in my heart to wean me away from the security of a salaried position as a 'full-time' pastor. I had already left a position with a 'good salary and a good pension' as a schoolteacher, to become a pastor on 'half salary and half pension'. He wanted to bring me even further to a position as a missionary with 'no salary and no pension'!

As pastor of a Christian & *Missionary* Alliance church I would encourage my people to be aware of the missionary mandate we were given by the Lord to *go into all the world and preach the gospel*. We would make major efforts each year to raise money to support our missionaries on the field, believing that the work they do is very important. I would preach missionary messages and encourage prayer. However, it was not until 1988 that I first became aware of how God weeps for the lost and hurting of the world.

I had established a *Mission Bridge* school in the church, meeting twice a week to hear teaching on tape and from local pastors, regarding Christian discipleship. There were fifteen students in the class from several churches. Their commitment was for six months of schooling including a three-week 'outreach' to work at orphanages in Mexico. It was while we were at such an orphanage that the Lord revealed His heart to me. My Mexican friend, Francisco, was taking photographs of the little children so that they could be sent back to Canada, USA and Great Britain in order to encourage sponsors whose monthly financial support would enable the work of the orphanages to continue. One of my students was sitting on a low wall in the orphanage with both her arms wrapped around a little Mexican girl. Cindy was crying and her tears were collecting on her chin before falling on to her lap. Looking round at her, Francisco quietly said, "Cindy, our hearts break every day!"

I had preached consistently on the faithfulness of God. He had become my Saviour, my Strength, my Supply, my Healer, my Sanctifier and so much more. I gave testimony gladly of all His goodness to me. He existed to bless me! As Francisco spoke to Cindy, I could have given testimony that I am seated in heavenly places in Jesus, enjoying the security of His lap. (Eph 2:6). However, at that moment I felt, as it were for the first time, His warm tears falling upon my head. I felt His broken heart - not just for the little orphans of Mexico but for all the hurt, wounded, poor of this world. How He longed for me to bless Him! He wanted me to be His hands reaching out.

I lost something of my heart during those two trips to Mexico. Like many of the Outreach team, I would never be the same. God was about to take me to another high mountain - but I was to walk through a long, dark valley to get there!

After returning from Mexico in January 1990, I became involved with local Indian believers. A number of their young people had come to trust in the Lord and were now facing persecution on the reserve. One of them was 'kidnapped' to the long house, where she would undergo an initiation ceremony to receive demonic spirits. This was against her will, but the Canadian police would do little to stop it as to cross reserve boundaries was a very delicate political matter.

In February 1990 several native people fled from the reserve and hid in the basement of our church. I was in constant contact with both the federal and provincial politicians at this time and leaning heavily on the support of fellow pastors. The two of us who were most closely involved with this situation, both became quite ill.

Many believers from all over the north-west of the USA and Canada would write to me or call me with words of encouragement, not knowing that I was undergoing a difficult time, possibly as many said, due to an Indian *curse*. I'm not sure what my theology is concerning such curses, though I know that many believers, church leaders among them, thought that that was the case. From the first night that the persecuted natives were in the church, I stopped sleeping. I asked pastor friends to pray for me, one of them saying that she sensed an '*awful spirit of abandonment*' upon me. I had no idea what she meant.

In May, Anne and I attended a week-long retreat for pastors conducted by the Anglican Church. It was there I was told that I had been under a curse but it was now broken. The leader added, "There is a major part of your emotions missing and it's to do with your mother's death." Again, I had no understanding of what he meant.

In June I resigned from the church as I continued with insomnia. My mind was 'adled'; I could not think clearly to study or counsel. I would lie on the floor in my study, crying to the Lord, asking why I was going through this experience. I never doubted His presence but I was insensitive to Him. I was taking several prescription tablets each evening to help me relax but was still unable to sleep. The church rejected my resignation and the District Superintendent asked me to remain. In September, I finally entered a sleep clinic at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. There it was diagnosed that there had been a complete breakdown of the *sleep trigger* mechanism in the penial gland and I was strongly advised to stop my work. The following Sunday I told the church of the specialist's advice and tendered my resignation, effective immediately.

I began, what my doctor expected to be, a two-year leave from ministry. I walked a lot, read many books and considered all that I had learned about myself and stress that causes insomnia. On Tuesday, following my resignation, I attended a breakfast with some pastor friends. As they chatted about my situation, one of them, new to the group, said, "Gareth, I sense an awful spirit of abandonment about you!" Exactly the same expression that had been said to me seven months earlier! When I returned home, Anne and I sat down and considered my life. We were amazed as we saw the many times that *the little boy inside me* would have felt the pain of abandonment, not least of them being when my mother died, leaving me, a thirteen year old. I had not cried at her death - after all, boys are not supposed to cry! However, I had grieved inwardly, and for many years afterwards.

That same evening, I picked up a book to read. It was a novel about the crusades of the eleventh century. There two knights came face to face in the battle. However, the crusader knight had been wounded and he was slumped over in the saddle with his sword hanging uselessly by his side. His enemy came in for the kill, raising his own mighty sword to slay the crusader. He was clad in strong armour and the arrows of the crusaders had been useless against him. When he raised his arm, however, nine arrows quickly found the mark in his unprotected armpit, and he fell from his horse, mortally wounded. I sensed the Spirit of God speaking to me. "Gareth, you can put on the whole armour of God for the daily battle. However, the enemy knows your weak places and he is ready to wound you as you raise your arm against him. Your weak place, your wounds, are in the area of abandonment." I now began to understand the tactics Satan had used to hinder my ministry.

During my sickness, as people began to drift away from the church, I regularly felt the pain of a divorce - abandonment. I saw how this had effected me, even before the Indian situation had arisen. Finally, the 'pain' had caused insomnia and I was weak in the battle.

I learned a great deal in that valley that God has enabled me to use in counselling many who carry wounds of the soul. In my other book *The Key In My Hand*, I tell some of those stories. However, God never takes us through a valley unless He wants to lead us to a mountain top, and mine was on the horizon.