

Chapter 25

Opening Doors.

Anne and I left the M/V Anastasis at the end of 1994. It had been four very fulfilling years since my valley of insomnia and we had been blessed with many wonderful experiences and new friends. We intended to return to beautiful British Columbia to, once again, take up the pastorate of a church with the Christian & Missionary Alliance. They had honoured me greatly by keeping my registration with them, even though I was no longer officially engaged in the work of that denomination. I was given the designation of *special ministry*, as the District Superintendent recognised the value of the work done by the crew of the Anastasis in the missions field of West Africa, an area where the C&MA had a prominent role.

First, however, we would take the opportunity to visit our daughter Lynette and her family in Australia. We were enabled to do this through the generosity of a visiting doctor on the Anastasis. One evening, while chatting, I mentioned that I had three grandchildren in Australia whom I had never seen. That afternoon he went to our cabin and told Anne, “Whenever you want to go to Australia, your tickets are paid for!” This would be a once-in-a-lifetime trip so we planned for a six month visit. Imagine our added delight when Anne was informed, almost apologetically, by the British travel agent, that the most economic way was for us to travel via Canada with a stop in Vancouver. “Yes, we could stop off en route if we wished.” Thus it was that spent one month in Victoria, seeing our other daughters’ families and friends, before continuing our journey to Lynette and her family in Camberra.

The first month would be very difficult for me, adjusting to a life of inactivity and uncertainty about the future. Then I went to teach the summer school of Capernwray Bible School at Moss Vale, near Sydney. This was the first week of January 1995, the students coming for one week from all over eastern Australia.

My invitation to speak at this school had come as a great surprise and is worthy of telling. Two years before, while in Africa, I had received a letter from a young couple who had attended Capernwray in Australia for a 6-month school. They told me that the principal had said that if I ever came to Australia, I would be welcome to teach at the school. (I read this as the normal comment of a leader responding to a student’s request to ‘please invite my pastor to come teach at the school’ – knowing that few of them would ever make it ‘downunder’.) When we knew we were going to Australia Oct 1995 – March 1996 – I wrote to the school principal telling him of our visit and wondering if there might be opportunity to teach at the school for a week or so. His reply was more than I had anticipated as he invited me to teach at this two-week ‘summer school’ to which people from all over the eastern seaboard of Australia would be coming. I was invited to give ten one-hour lectures on a topic of my choosing.

About seventy of us gathered at Wongabri, the beautiful home of Capernwray, on New Years’ Eve 1995. Peter McDonough, the principal welcomed us and then invited each to stand and introduce him/herself. Many had come large distances to attend this week, from Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane, besides those more near. I was the last to stand and began my introduction by saying, “Peter McDonough, you are either a very brave man, a very foolish man or a very spiritual man!” I went on to tell how he had invited me to be their speaker, unseen and unheard. “I might be the most boring speaker you have ever heard and you have paid good money to travel here and attend this school.” Sufficient to say that the week went very well and I was constantly aware of the Lord’s leading as my teachings from the Book of Ephesians dovetailed so well with the other lectures given by Peter and one of his colleagues. (The theme of my teaching became the source of the first book I wrote “The Key in My Hand”)

As we gathered to say our farewells, Peter told how he had come to invite me to be their teacher. He had come into his office one day with a list of names he was to pray over to see whom he should invite. He asked his secretary not to disturb him as he would spend this morning in prayer. He was surprised to hear there was only

one letter that had arrived that day instead of the usual many, so he decided he would read it before he began his prayer. It was from a stranger in Africa saying he would be honoured to teach at the (ordinary) school if there was opportunity. Peter was struck by the fact that only one letter had arrived that day and began to wonder if this was the Lord's intervention. He had no peace about whom to invite when he went home to lunch with his wife, Pam. They prayed together and felt that the Lord had indeed directed them by this sole letter – “so I invited Gareth with much apprehension.”

As a result of that week, I received invitations to speak at many churches. In February, Anne and I drove to Melbourne where we attended the annual conference of the C&MA in Australia. More invitations followed so that, soon we were finding each weekend taken up with speaking engagements. There were two weekend conferences in Adelaide, separated by ten days in Perth, western Australia. Then a visit to Brisbane where we had the opportunity to spend time with my sister and her family.

Before leaving Australia, I received a visit from the Australian President of the C&MA who invited me to return two years later to conduct a retreat for his pastors, elders and their wives in Melbourne.

“This is what you should be doing.” said Anne. “Your heart is not in the politicking of a local church, but in coming alongside pastors and missionaries to encourage them and minister to them. Take time out to see if this is where the Lord will lead you next. We can live on the income from students in our home and you can travel to teach.”

Sufficient to say that, in these subsequent years, we have been amazed as we have seen the leading of the Lord in opening doors for me to travel and minister in so many countries, none of which I have sought by letter or phone. He has provided every penny I have needed for the travel, without any soliciting or informing anyone of the need. I have traveled to Mexico, Peru and Brazil, India and Nepal, Australia and New Zealand, Holland and Great Britain. Each time I get on a plane I express my amazement to the Lord with a prayer that He keep me from a tourist attitude and pride, and that He leads me to the hurting worker to whom He wants me to speak.