

The encourager

THE MAGAZINE OF ELEVATE CHRISTIAN DISABILITY TRUST

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*A father designs
a headstone for
his wheelchair
bound son
depicting him*

***"FREE OF HIS
EARTHLY
BURDENS"***

See page 3 for full article





You'll never know that Jesus is a



In the Potter's Hands

A devotion from Joni Eareckson Tada included with permission, following on from Margie's devotion last issue.

Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him." Jeremiah 18: 1-4

On November 19, 1991 Cathe Chermesino was running down South Street, trying to make it to Calvary Baptist School before the late bell rang. On the surface she had it all. She was a beautiful, talented thirteen-year-old who possessed YMCA swimming medals, not to mention a beautiful singing voice. When she ran across the street, she was hit by a fast-moving car and thrown into the air. Immediately Cathe became totally paralyzed.

Cathe now goes to school sitting rigid and upright in a bulky wheelchair. She breathes through a ventilator and has to carefully mouth her words so others can lip-read.

On the first anniversary of her accident, she gave her testimony at her church. "I'm like the potter's clay," she said. "I'm being reshaped into something that I believe will be far better. What looks harmful for me will actually turn out to be good. Before the accident I was an awful snob, but now God has given me an inner peace. I'm giving my voice a rest until I get to heaven."

Her mother looked lovingly at her daughter and added, "Cathe needs just two things to make it through. A lot of prayer and a little bit of oxygen."

Recently I wrote Cathe and gave her a verse from Deuteronomy 31:8, ***"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."***

Lord, if you can help Cathe to rise above her circumstances, I know that with your grace I will rise above mine.

DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY

COMING UP
ON 17 JUNE



Disability Awareness Sunday is a day to celebrate, to raise awareness and to encourage people affected by disability.

Do contact your minister to ensure they will include a portion of their service on that day. A great aid the church can make use of would be showing one or two videos we have just finished creating, and we believe they would leave congregations inspired and moved. You and your minister can view these on Facebook.

[Facebook.com/ElevateChristianDisabilityTrust](https://www.facebook.com/ElevateChristianDisabilityTrust)



Another aid for your minister would be for him or her to ring our Centre 09-6364763 to have sent our booklet "Ideas for Disability Awareness Sunday".

The story behind the cover photo

In 1988, because of a lack of oxygen at birth, Matthew Robinson was born in the United States with severe disabilities.

He was blind, mostly paralysed, and spoke only a few words. He lived ten years, and during that time his parents noticed that many individuals with disabilities languished because they could not afford the assistive equipment they needed.

This knowledge prompted the Robinsons to create "Ability Found", and since 1993 this non-profit group has been providing people with disabilities with much needed equipment, facilitating independence, productivity, safety, opportunity and dignity.


Ernest Robinson often tells others that he has the best job in the world because he routinely sees miracles happen in people's lives as they gain capabilities and freedom they have not had before.

He is inspired by the success stories and thank you letters from grateful individuals whose lives have been changed. Many times tears flow as individuals find new hope and horizons open to them. This is a truly rewarding and life-changing venture.

In the year 2000 to mark Matthew's grave, Ernest Robinson and his cousin Susan Comish fabricated a sculpture of Matthew and others like him. It stands

in the Salt Lake City cemetery, and has inspired many people who have dealt with life's challenges similar to Matthew. It depicts Matthew climbing out of his worn wheelchair, being healed and going to heaven.

On the back of the monument are these words:



*In memory of those
who walk more closely
in the hands of God*

*and more humbly
the world inspiring
the hearts of men*

*With their legacy complete
in love, they return,
home again to God*

*to behold His face
and be wholly healed
In joy forever more*

Ten ways to love

Listen without interrupting (Proverbs 18)

Speak without accusing (James 1:19)

Give without sparing (Proverbs 21:26)

Pray without ceasing (Colossians 1:9)

Answer without arguing (Proverbs 17:1)

Share without pretending (Ephesians 4:15)

Enjoy without complaint (Philippians 2:14)

Trust without wavering (Corinthians 13:7)

Forgive without punishing (Colossians 3:13)

Promise without forgetting (Proverbs 13:12)



*The Masterton Joy Ministries
at their Christmas meeting*



The measure of a life is not

Raymond Mok's testimony:

God is good all the time.
Jesus is Lord.

My name is Raymond Mok and I am 31. I was born in Hong Kong, have spent most of my life in Auckland, and have been living in Hamilton for two years.

I was brought up in a Christian background, and went to Christian preschool and primary school. My parents brought me to church every week since I was a child, and I accepted Jesus as my saviour. However, it took many twists and turns until I submitted myself to God and let Him be the Lord of my life. For some years I was practising religion without an intimate relationship with God. I had the tendency to rely on myself, and repeatedly lost focus on God. After struggling a lot, relying on myself and failing, I have learnt that God pursues a continuing love relationship with me that is real and personal.

"It took many twists and turns until I submitted myself to God and let Him be the Lord of my life."

When I was four, I frequently asked my Dad to carry me, so the adults around me thought I was too lazy to walk. At age five, I once had to carry a pile of books up some stairs and struggled step by step. My Mum took me to the doctor asking what was the problem. Initially, the doctor said I was fine; but when I started having difficulty going up stairs even without carrying a load, she referred me to the hospital to get checked. At seven I was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

There was a time when I blamed God for my suffering. I asked Him, "Why is my life so hard?", and said to Him, "If You love me, just end the suffering." I was so focused on my circumstances that I doubted His love and had trouble hearing His voice. I demanded Him to heal me. I had the idea that if God healed me, I would work for Him and He would be glorified that way.

I also had a grudge against someone who called me a name at high school because of my disability. For ten years I wanted to get even. I thought my grudge against him could only be resolved if there was a cure for my disability or if I got rich and famous. I was a top student at school, and had the kind of pride that made me mistakenly believe that I could use my wit to get everything I wanted. When I was at university I made myself study so hard that I had very little social life and not enough rest, but I managed to get very good grades and even completed an internship with a scholarship. I convinced myself that my disability was going to be cured in a few years because researchers had just found a cure for the mouse model of my condition. I thought I could just study and work hard, then I would get everything I wanted, including getting even. I thought justice would be served that way. I pushed myself over the limit. I was depressed and suicidal, and couldn't sleep for a month. My confidence was very low.

After graduating from university, I tried to rush through life to achieve my goals quickly. I tried so hard to make money. I believed that money would enable me to have a happy life and to find success and love. I got into currency trading and failed. Then I did a Postgrad Diploma in Finance, just to learn that there is no sure way of making profit. When I didn't get what I wanted, I looked for escape by playing Facebook games, watching TV drama and trading currencies. I got bored with them, but couldn't get away. I was lonely and sad. I became angry when I didn't get the miracle I expected. I could forgive other people but not the bully or myself. I hated the fact that I couldn't get over it.



All those years I had been trying to get even by working hard so as to prove my enemy wrong. I chose to chase after money and fame to overcome my enemy, no matter how long it would take. Anger motivated me but it was also a burden. But God's ways are not my ways. I didn't know what I saw as suffering was blessing in disguise. During a dark time of my life God spoke to me by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church. About four years ago when I was depressed, He spoke to me through a young man named Nick Vujicic. He was born without arms and legs; he was depressed because he was bullied at school; he was angry that God didn't give him limbs, and he tried to drown himself when he was a child. Then God turned his life around. Nick changed his attitude by forgiving his bullies, and stopped being angry with God. His life was transformed after letting go of grudges, and he became an international motivational speaker and evangelist. I was so moved by Nick's story that I finally got over the past, forgave the person who insulted me, and quit my addiction. God restored my faith through Nick reminding me that God loves me.

After hearing Nick Vujicic talk about God's amazing work in his life and hearing many other testimonies about God leading people through difficulties, I realised that God can shine His glory through people facing challenges in their lives.

I had prayed for physical healing before. God answered my prayer by healing my soul. He hasn't healed my body yet, but He did something even more amazing. God gave me peace, as it is written:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 4:6-7)

The Holy Spirit also reminded me that Jesus died for His enemies on the cross and said,

"Forgive them for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34a).

He died for us when we were His enemy. So, how can I not forgive others? Jesus died on the cross and took my sin so I can be forgiven and have an intimate relationship with God. As the Son of God, Christ endured the greatest suffering. He bore the sin of the

entire world and was separated from His Father.

After letting go of the past and once again submitting myself to God, I experienced spiritual growth and started to hear His voice again. The Holy Spirit taught me the Word through the Bible and the church. The Lord spoke to me through Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose*

Driven Life, telling me that He has His purpose for every person's life. Glorifying God is the purpose of human life. He doesn't expect us to be thankful for evil, sin, suffering or their painful consequences in the world. Instead, God wants us to thank Him that He will use our problems to fulfil His purposes

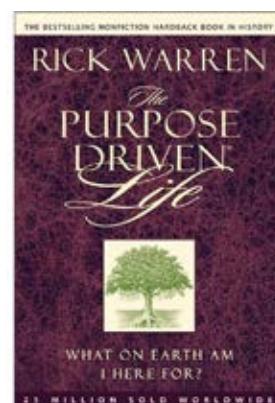
"because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." (Romans 5:3b-5)

It is God's will to build our character for eternity. No matter what's happening, you can rejoice in God's love, care, wisdom, power, and faithfulness. The Purpose Driven Life helped me make much better sense of life.

When Jesus' disciples asked Him if a man was born blind because he or his parents sinned, Jesus replied

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:3)

From this story, I learnt that God can use my disability to bless others. I became clear that my disability is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, as God's children we can bless others, just like God has promised that the nations will be blessed through Abraham and his descendants. This fact is evident at the Elevate National Camp. A Christian friend encouraged me to go so I went for the first time in 2015. I was so amazed by God's presence and His work at the camp. I went again last year. In my prayers I have been asking God to show what He wants me to do. He answered through Becke and Pastor Geoff. Becke shared about focussing on what God has called us to do, and being what God has made us to be rather than asking God





Stand up to your obstacles. You will find that
- Norman

to change our environment, so we can go deeper with God. Pastor Geoff talked about how Jesus' love is expressed through healing, encouraging, acts of service, speaking life, teaching and humility. I was moved to seek further God's will in my life. I pray that God will teach me to do His will and to love like Jesus does.

Indeed, I can rely on God because His grace is enough. He has taught me not to worry about the future. The Lord will provide all that I need. Now I thank God for His blessings. He has blessed me in both obvious and mysterious ways. The blessings are not about me but are all about God and His glory. I find that the worst form of suffering is being away from God, but the greatest joy is being with Him. The worst time in my life was when I drifted away from God and tried to rely on myself. I now have the peace and joy from the

Lord even though my physical ability has reduced due to my condition. I realised that praying according to God's will is to ask Him to do whatever it takes to bring us more under His kingly rule. To be blessed is to see more of God.

Whether or not God physically heals me on earth, I can be assured that there will be no illness in His Eternal Kingdom when I get there. Whoever believes in Christ Jesus will live and reign with Him forever. We can lean on God who is in control of everything. ■



Raymond - dress up at National Camp

A CALL FOR YOU TO TAKE **URGENT ACTION** ON THE **END OF LIFE CHOICE BILL** - EUTHANASIA

Submissions have now closed, but the MPs will be making up their minds between now and August before it is voted on in Parliament. Please join us in contacting your local MP and urging the MP to vote to defend the disabled by voting "No" on the Bill. You can email them at firstname.lastname@parliament.govt.nz, or write them at "MP's Name, Parliament Buildings, Wellington" Make sure you include your address and your electorate. It doesn't have to be flash. But please join us in doing something, and not passing by on the other side.

DO YOU REALISE IF THIS BILL IS PASSED

- It would legalise assisted suicide, that is, someone's life being shortened and ended by lethal dose of poison given by a doctor. Refusing treatment, giving pain medications up till death, and ordinary suicide are already legal.
- It would apply both to the terminally ill, and to those with grievous, irremediable, incurable and mentally declining conditions. That includes the vast majority of Elevate clients.
- Because the Bill is broad, vague, and dangerous it would undermine the medical trust between doctors and their patients—vulnerability and weakness are only okay in our medical system because of the trust we have that doctors will cure, not kill. We stand with those doctors who refuse to kill.
- The Bill has extremely weak safeguards, and it applies to everyone over the age of 18 who is mentally competent, has no stand down period, no psych exams, and euthanasia can be granted on the say-so of two GPs who don't have to be specialists.

Elevate strongly opposes the Bill. We stand for the value of disabled life, not the normalisation of disabled suicide, or the ending of disabled or terminally ill life.

We stand with other disability organisations, churches, doctors and hospice and palliative care workers in flatly rejecting that idea. We are not political people, but we are determined, right from the beginning of our ministry, to defend the value of disabled people, and speak up for our lives.

We reject the idea that suicide is an autonomous choice: We already know the barriers disabled people have to face. We think throwing poison drugs into the middle of an already creaking medical system will change the game forever, narrow the choices disabled people are allowed to make, and permanently devalue disabled life.

they haven't half the strength you think they have.
Vincent Peale

A VERY SPECIAL 70TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Taken from introductory remarks read out at the 70th birthday celebration of Margie Willers, co-founder of our ministry.

"We are celebrating Margie attaining the promised three score and ten years. In the natural, during her younger years, achieving this certainly wasn't anticipated. Her entrance into the world came in 1948 and proved to be a harrowing ordeal. There were many complexities, mismanagement and neglect that surrounded her birth. With today's advanced medical technology the situation could well have resulted in a very different outcome.

"At the age of 11 months this little girl was diagnosed with severe cerebral palsy. She'll never sit up, talk or walk her parents were told. She'll never learn to read or write. The potential with regard to achieving any level of education was total zilch. The strong recommendation given to her mother was to place the baby in an institute – walk away and forget you ever had her!



Margie and Mary Graham, co-writer of Awaiting The Healer



"Now I detect that that baby is the one featured in today's sideshow. ...Note the spark in the eyes that hide a fierce determination. From early girlhood a meaningful Bible verse from the book of Jeremiah Chapter 29 verse 11 was to become a secure anchor throughout her faith journey.

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for good, to prosper and not to harm. Plans to give you a future and a hope, and God doesn't lie."

"That's what this afternoon's celebration is about. It's about overcoming insurmountable odds, achievement, attitude, treasured friendships with special people who have profoundly impacted her life. It's about an awesome God who is involved on a daily basis, a God who has unfolded an incredible journey, a God who has enabled her to live a life beyond all expectations – Amazing."

**CAMPS
2018**

Please take note and put in your diaries

Auckland CFFD	23-25 March	Carey Park, Henderson, Akl
Emmanuel Family Camp	13-15 April	Totara Springs, Matamata
Christchurch Day Camp	14 April	Reformed Church, St Albans
Joy Ministries National Camp	18-20 May	Totara Springs, Matamata
National Labour Wkend Camp	19-22 Oct	Totara Springs, Matamata



If God brings you to it, H



Vision

STUDENTS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN OUR MINISTRY

*Over the years, students from Bible colleges and AUT have spent time doing their practicum at the Centre and thereby fulfilling one of the requirements of their courses. In so doing, many have been sold on the importance of disability ministry, and some have followed this with active involvement. None more so than Sze, who came through Faith Bible College in 1993, and returned to Malaysia, longing to get her church deeply involved. In 2002 she took a huge step forward. **She writes:***

AN EXHILARATING, UNBELIEVABLY MIRACULOUS EXPERIENCE

The past fifteen years with the disability ministry in our local church has been an exhilarating, unbelievably miraculous experience. From a small group of five mothers meeting regularly on a weekday morning for sharing and prayer, God has grown the work He began in 2002 to incorporate seven ministries serving over 50 families of people with disabilities:

PSG - a support group serving parents of children with special needs and their families, holding relevant talks and discussions once a month

B-Hive - a playgroup for younger children with disabilities, providing early intervention and one-to-one tutorials 3 mornings a week

GLORY - a youth group comprising young people with disabilities gathering fortnightly

GIFT - a support group for Mandarin-speaking parents of children with special needs meeting once a month

DESTINY - a Sunday School class for special kids held twice a month

PROMISE - a discipleship ministry for youth with special needs running thrice a month

STAND - a production workshop to train young adults with disabilities in work skills operating 4 days a week

To God be ALL the glory, for it is His inspiration and hand that has brought all these to pass.

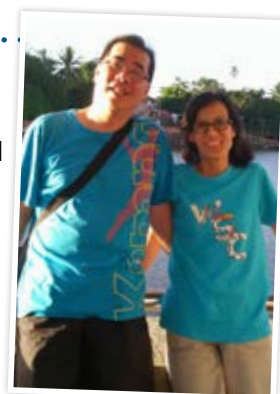
We now stand at a threshold of a new beginning. Early last year, God spoke to us about bringing

STAND out into the marketplace. Thus, by faith, we have set up a social enterprise in food production to

provide training and employment opportunities for our special young adults. And guess who God has called to pioneer this arm of our ministry? - my husband, Hock Cheng! I couldn't believe it when he shared this idea with me.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine we would be labouring side by side in disability ministry.

This has been the most courageous step our support group - and our family have ever taken, as we have had to move outside the church to begin this endeavour. Hock Cheng has had to lay down his full time position as missions director of the church to spearhead this new venture. And God has proved Himself faithful and provided beyond expectation.



The STAND Group

To cut a long story short, God has been reviving the dream that He planted in my heart way back in 1993 - that life-changing season, when as a student in Faith Bible College on my practicum, He led me to be part of the CMWDT family (now called Elevate) at their Centre in Onehunga. Last year, He brought Prabhu and Nancy Rayan of Inclusive Worldwide from India to Malaysia. They shared a powerful message on

inclusion that reignited my purpose, and enlarged my vision. God began to stir me, prompting me that NOW is the time to begin moving out to launch a disability ministry beyond the walls of the church, not unlike CMWDT. How I dreamt of such a vision becoming a reality in Malaysia almost 25 years ago! Everything He revealed back in New Zealand is flooding back in torrents... of spreading disability awareness to churches all over Malaysia, setting up a Christ-centred interdenominational drop-in Centre for people with disabilities - a place to share the gospel and disciple them, enabling them to serve and develop their gifts by sending them out to be active members of the local churches around them.

Recently, we were privileged to run a full day workshop on inclusion with the Rayans who were on a stopover in Malaysia. Put together at the last minute and hardly publicized, we prayed that God would get the word out to the people He knew we needed to connect with. He alone knew who and where they were. To our amazement, 38 people from 13 different churches showed up! I was blown away. But isn't that just like God to do the impossible? And that is how I am persuaded we will continue this exhilarating, unbelievably miraculous journey - the way it all began. I am reading Hugh Willis's "On the Knife Edge of Faith" again to inspire myself.

To be completely honest, all I have is this awesome promise from God:

1 Corinthians 2:9, 10 *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."* But it was to us that God revealed these things by His Spirit..."



Sze's Family

Deep down, I know God is in some measure, referring to His cherished vision of people with disabilities in Malaysia being included fully into His Kingdom. How will this happen, you may ask? I have no idea yet, but I am assured that His Spirit has the perfect master plan. Please pray that He will raise up a passionate team of like mind and purpose, having His heart for people with disabilities in our nation, and that He will send alongside godly people we can be accountable to, and who will willingly provide guidance and correction. Led by His Spirit, may we be obedient, humble and focused, so we can walk and work together to make our Master's command in **Luke 14:21-23**, a reality. *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (of Malaysia)... so that my house will be full."* ■

Harry and Marianne Oor

This photo was taken on a recent trip back to New Zealand from Holland alongside the plaque at the Eleos room at the Centre.

They and Barry and Jenny Utting were the co-founders of the Eleos vision, and it was the Eleos Trust who sponsored the total cost of the new outside building at the Centre. – what an awesome gift.



Harry and Marianne Oor



Life without God is like an unsh

Testimony Bob Reynolds

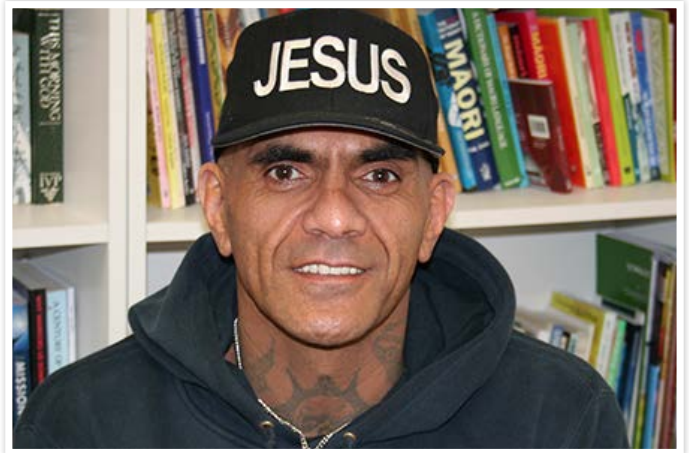
RESCUED FROM A LIFE OF DRUG DEPENDENCE AND CRIME

At a young age I chose the wrong path.

My parents were heavy drinkers which meant our home was filled with alcoholics and gang members. Because of this at a young age I looked after my younger siblings while my parents went out to a lot of parties. The heavy drinking also involved a lot of violence that occurred within my home. Experiencing this at the age of 10, I felt pushed away, and this pushed me to go on a search for real love, because I felt I wasn't getting any sort of love from my parents. I looked for answers to fill the emptiness in my heart. When you don't know God you start looking for love and I began looking for love on the streets.

At a young age I became a street kid, using solvents and was involved in a lot of crime. I then started getting into drugs and hanging out with the wrong crowd, particularly the Mongrel Mob eventually ending up in prison. Being in and out of prison became a normal occurrence for me. I was a drug user for 30 years. To me this was my life and I felt stuck in it with no way out. I had it all - the money, the drugs, fancy cars, women, and yet still felt this emptiness.

In 1999 after another drinking session I fell asleep at the wheel and the car crashed into a bridge. My spinal chord was broken - I was left a paraplegic and spent 3 months in hospital. Life was now even more empty, and I tried many times to end my life. In my final attempt in 2008 I took 100 pills and ended up in hospital on a life support machine. My mum had a meeting with my eldest sibling that night and decided that they were going to turn off the machine, but as my mother went to switch off the life support I woke up, I looked her straight in the eyes and said why am I still here? But that was once again God's doing to keep me alive. That's why I now believe He has big plans for my life and that is to glorify Him and let others know that there is hope, and this hope is found in Jesus Christ.



It wasn't until I was 42 years of age that something miraculous happened to me. I met Raki, a Christian support worker who came to my house to help me with cleaning, washing and other house-hold chores. Raki was sent by God to help me at this time. The first time I met him he told me he was a Christian. At that time I had already pushed away all my family and friends and I was just on the verge of killing myself. If it weren't for Raki I wouldn't be here today. I felt I was at rock bottom and was in a bad physical and mental state. He kept coming over to my house and speaking to me about Jesus and I couldn't stand it. But I realized later that he was truly God's appointment with me. He kept coming over and sharing about Jesus but I didn't want to hear it. I questioned his belief in Jesus, and asked many times how could this Jesus help me. I was so troubled, and failed several suicide attempts. Every time I would open my eyes and realize that I was still alive. This made me cry as I did not want to be alive anymore. It wasn't till later that I understood Jeremiah 29:11.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."

That scripture is why I kept waking up, because God has a plan for me, and at that time I just didn't know it. After numerous visits by Raki I finally gave in to his invitation to go to the church life group he was running. Things started to change dramatically for me when I met Mike, a faithful servant of God, on the 3rd of October 2012. He told me about an event called Promise Keepers, one specifically for men, and as he shared more about it I became interested and told Mike I wouldn't mind attending this event. The night I went I gave my heart to the Lord. Four days later I attended church with Raki The Pastor prayed over me

that day and I felt good, but went back to smoking Crystal meth, and it wasn't until the 14th October that I went back to church with Raki. As I sat at the back ready to take off again I heard a message by the pastor that really hit my heart. He said that God had given him a message the night before to share with the church, he didn't know who it was for, but he knew it had to be shared. As the Pastor shared I felt the message was directly for me, and I started to freak out. I thought Raki must have told the pastor about me, but he hadn't.

This was God, because only God knew these things about my life. As the pastor kept sharing I felt this electric sensation shooting inside of me like shocks of electrical balls going up and down my body in a great rush that I've never felt before. All the rushes I felt by the drugs I've taken were nothing compared to this rush. This feeling was better than any drug I've ever tried, and I later realised this was the Holy Spirit. As the pastor kept sharing, I was on a spiritual high the entire time and wanted to remain in that high. He emphasised the need to burn our past and let it all go. I knew this was exactly what I needed to do, so I went up to the altar call that day and did exactly that. After the service Raki and I went back to my place and threw away all the needles I was using to take my drugs, and smashed all my drug pipes. I believed with my whole heart that my time to change and give my life over to the Lord for real was that very day.

Monday morning I woke up and literally jumped out of bed. I knew from that day that I was going to follow Jesus with all my heart, my mind, my strength and all my love. Because of Him I am finally free from drugs, but there were many trials and tests that started coming my way, and they came hard. Friends came over wanting to do drugs and I told them no. I was offered drugs for free and I still said no. The devil was really trying to undo all the good that God had done for me, and I stood my ground and said, "No more drugs!" I told all my old friends that if they wanted to do drugs they could do it at their own houses. They along with my family didn't believe that I had changed. In their eyes I was so bad there was no way I could change. But that's the thing - nothing is impossible with God - He makes all things possible! and I kept following Him with everything I had.

A year after my walk with God I was hungry for more, so I applied to study at Laidlaw Bible College. A campus had just opened in Manukau and I thought this would be a great opportunity to spiritually learn

more about God. I made contact with Fiona Sherwood from Laidlaw College, she helps people with disabilities there. When I asked my pastor to sign a few forms he was sceptical about my aspirations to go to Bible College, suggesting that I was not spiritually old enough to pursue this. I told him to just sign the form, and he did! That Friday I applied through Study Link for my tuition fees but they declined my application because of my past voluntary bankruptcy. I remained positive and kept praying, asking God for a sign if this was the right path. As I wasn't able to pay my tuition fees I asked God that if this was the right path for me, to give me a sign. I waited for God and still nothing, but one day Fiona called me to say someone had donated money to pay for a person with disabilities to study. Starting class was difficult for me because I didn't know how to write essays, or even where to put commas and full stops. However, I kept trying my best, and with the help of the Holy Spirit I was able to pass one of my papers with a B+ grade. This was amazing as I did not even know what an essay was. I give all the glory to Jesus because He helped me a lot throughout my studies.

Last year I received my certificate, Praise God! The timing for my studies was perfect, everything had fallen into place because it was all in God's timing, not my own. God is awesome and He is the greatest! I just want to give God all the glory for the transformation that He has done in my life. It's been so good! I am a child of God, and He just loves me with a real kind of love, not a temporary unfulfilling one that the devil gives. God gives an eternal love that is free for everyone who truly believes in Him. Jesus has filled my empty heart, and I am forever thankful to Him for that. My search for love is over, and I have found exactly what I have always longed for as a child. I love sharing my testimony, and am so happy that I can go around and just glorify God through it.

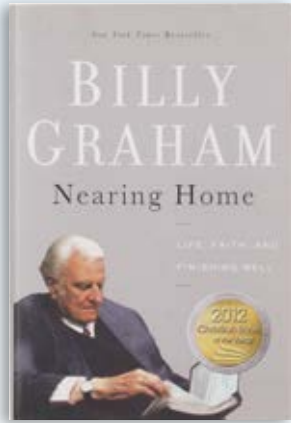
Helping people to find hope in Jesus Christ is what I now love to do. ■





BOOK REVIEW

Nearing Home by Billy Graham



Last month people throughout the world were saddened to hear of the death of Billy Graham at the fine age of 99 - one of the greatest men of all time.

A few years ago, "W Publishing Group" published a book, "**Nearing Home**" (NZ price \$27.99). This book by Billy Graham brings incredible wisdom to all, especially those who will be retiring in the next 20 years. It is so well written, brings forth so many lessons Billy has learnt over the years, and is presented in such a sensitive form.

The following excerpt will serve as a good example:

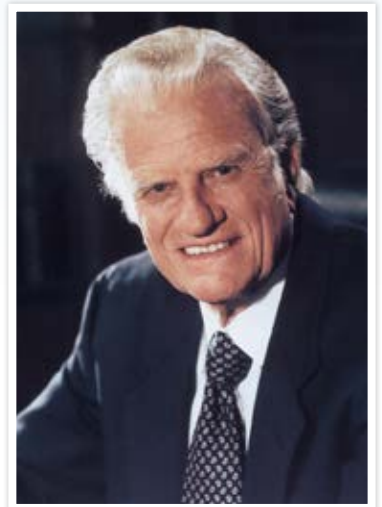
Retirement - The Two Paths

For those who are retired and still in good health, there are many opportunities for service. We should always be expecting the Lord to reveal His plans for us. Just because we are retired does not mean our work is done. Retirement provides us the opportunity to spend more time doing God's work, serving others in the name of the Lord.

So many people come to mind when I think of those who have retired for various reasons. One of these is my friend Mel Cheatham, one of the most respected neurosurgeons in the world. He had one of the busiest private practices in California while also holding a prestigious appointment as clinical professor of neurosurgery at UCLA. Highly respected by his peers, he developed new surgical procedures, wrote extensively for various medical journals, and was elected head of his specialty's professional association. But then, at the peak of his career, he stepped away from his work and took early retirement.

"In the eyes of most of my colleagues, I'm completely retired," he told me several years after resigning his positions, "but in reality I've never been busier. What they don't understand is that I have retired solely because I felt God was calling me to use my experience in a new way, which is what I have done, and these have been the most exciting years of my

life." Now he travels all over the world advising hospitals and clinics in less developed countries on how they can meet the medical needs of their people more effectively. He also writes regularly, using his postretirement experiences to urge doctors and other medical personnel to volunteer their services to those in need. Much of his work is carried on through Samaritan's Purse.



Far different is the story I heard some years ago about another man. An astute business man with an impressive record of success, he was hired by a large but languishing company to become its president while in his early fifties. Within a few years he had turned the business around not only reversing its fortunes but overseeing its expansion into a number of other countries. Stories of his success as an executive appeared regularly in business journals, and his advice on economic matters was eagerly sought by business groups and government agencies. In



accordance with his company's rules he retired at age sixty-eight, staying on for a brief time as an advisor to the company's new president, but otherwise no longer involved in its affairs.

"I was totally unprepared for retirement," he confessed later. "I'd been too busy with any hobbies other than the occasional round of golf, which was always business related anyway. The company had been my life, but after I drove away from the office for the last time, they didn't even call me.

We moved, and for a year or so I kept myself occupied building our dream home, but once it was finished I

didn't know what to do next. Now I play golf every day, not because I particularly love it, but because I can't think of anything else to do. My wife says I'm depressed, but she doesn't understand how useless I feel. I hate being retired."

Admittedly you may not be a highly skilled neurosurgeon or a major corporate executive, very few of us are. But the contrast between these two individuals points to a very important lesson we all need to learn about our retirement years: the best time to prepare for them is before they happen. Beyond that however is an even more important lesson: no matter who we are, retirement presents us with two choices. Either we can use it to indulge ourselves, or we can use it to make an impact on the lives of others. In other words, the choice we face is between empty self-indulgence and meaningful activity.

Take the retired business executive I profiled previously. I strongly suspect that at least a dozen non-profit social service agencies in the community could have used his business expertise to help themselves become more effective. They would have loved to have him volunteer to assist them – but he never did. ■

This was a Man
with an Incredible
Mission

Di Willis became a Born Again Christian during the 1969 Billy Graham crusade. She is so grateful to him - this amazing humble man of God with an incredible mission to win people for Christ, His message was very simple: God loves you and His Son Jesus died for us so as to take our sin and go to heaven when we die, to live a life honouring to God, and you too can have your life transformed if you will give your life to Jesus. Let us know at Elevate.

MACKINLY FROM MALAWI



In the last Encourager we described how Mackinly has returned to his home country Malawi from studying here at CBM with a huge burden for and a passion to reach out to those with disabilities in his home country through educating churches and pastors about how they need to reach out to those with disabilities, to include them, and to play a part in meeting the huge needs that exist all round the land. They have no equipment, medical help etc.

If anyone feels to contribute to meeting these costs, please send donations to our Centre, marked "for Malawi". Note these are not tax-deductable.



Faith is not knowing what the

THROUGH THE EYES OF ONE WITH AUTISM

Matthew Schwass

Leslie Schwass tells here about her 35 year old son's battle to overcome the effects of autism.

Matthew came in at 5.5 lbs, five weeks early. At three months he reacted to the immunisation injection, and then failed to develop at normal milestone pace. He was diagnosed with a host of problems, but chiefly brain injury with autistic tendencies. He also had mild cerebral palsy. As a family we were advised Matthew might not be able to walk, see or hear properly. When he was five we were told by a paediatric professor that Matthew was 98% intellectually handicapped. He said everything I did for Matthew was a waste of time. However, I persisted to help my son by pouring hours of time into teaching him to read, write, ride bikes and horses, swim and enjoy life.

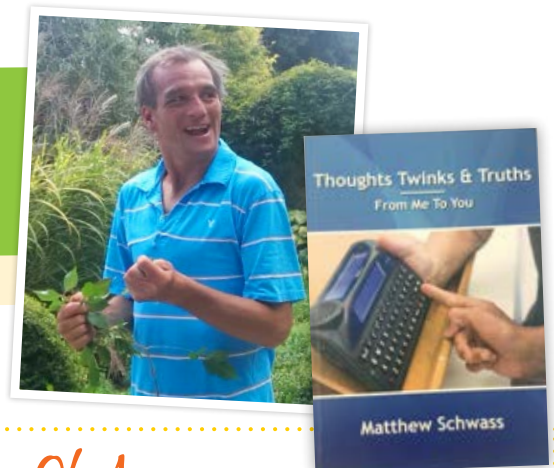
Childhood saw Matthew undergoing many therapies, and as a trained and registered physiotherapist, I exercised Matty several times a day for many years. I did patterning, balance, strengthening exercises, speech therapy, sensory integration therapy, behavioural modification programmes and more. I home schooled Matthew, and he graduated from Massey University with a Bachelor of Arts (majoring in English) in 2011.

Matthew used to scream a lot, and life was stressful for us all. However, now we can say our lives have all been enriched by this amazing young man. He is intelligent, witty, always happy despite often being in pain with a bowel disorder or being disorientated after seizures.

Matthew has little speech, but uses a light-writer (a talking device) to communicate. His insights, wisdom and humour are amazing, and his outlook and interpretation of nature and life are inspirational. He is one of my best friends, and my closest confidant.

He has just published a book containing over a hundred poems he has written. I believe you will come away feeling encouraged and blessed as you start to see through this autistic man's eyes wonderful truths from him to you. I have included here one of these and part of another.

Send \$23 to cover the cost of the book and postage to Matthew Schwass, 94 Cameron Rd, Te Puke, 3119 ■



Wings Of Aura

*Wings soaring, riding in rigorous Antarctic gales
solitary, yet not lonely as these awe-inspiring,
albatrosses make predestined journeys across the seas.*

*The cathedral bells chime; the Gocad God bird
arrives. Magic momentum makes mystic moves
as this enchanting albatross nests for the spring. All
the people flock to observe the exquisite fowl.
admire its plumage, gape at its dramatic rituals, its
romancing, its dedication to young.*

*They incubate for 83 days, you know, and parents
Share care-giving for months: No family courts. No
Divorces. No crimes. Should an albatross get hurt at sea
Real neighbours rally to feed, and with much TLC*

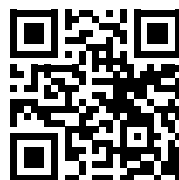
In Heaven

Heaven is as near as you allow it.
We are housed in an individual encasement,
A body unique but in damage and repair mode
But our spirit has the ability to be renewed
To be regenerated
To be refined
Moulded
Shaped with Spirit
Empowered to see the Lord.

All heaven's hosts
witness the truth,
and when God chooses
we see the future.

My spirit is with the angels
giving glory to our Lord in Heaven

A combined meeting in Palmerston North of several CFFD branches – Wellington, Manawatu, Taranaki, Whanganui and Bible Friends in early December. Nick Abplanalp, one of the Trustees, was the speaker.



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Joy Ministries - National, Auckland Central, West & East Jan Bridgeman	bridgeman@extra.co.nz	027 641 2653
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Hawkes Bay - Brad & Karen Spurgeon	spurgeonnz@gmail.com	06 876 1106
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Other ministries around the country		
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Kumbayah - St David's Presbyterian Church - Palmerston North Ann Bennett		06 355 2818
Bible Friends - Wanganui Louise Rostron	rostrons@extra.co.nz	06 344 5955
THRIVE - Greerton Bible Church, Tauranga Ray Harvey	ray@eol.co.nz	027 284 9433



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PCFFD Picnic Fellowship



Leslie de la Ganar writes:

Thank God, the Fellowship is growing! When I was inviting the PCFFD members for our Picnic Fellowship on the 8th day of February, they were all excited! Maybe because it is time for them to go out and of course to have an Outdoor Fellowship for the first time on that place near in one of the biggest rivers in the Philippines wherein connected in the Bustos Dam added the thrill. One said "it is really a blessing to be able to come in this place because this is my first time to see this big river even though I live in Bulacan". And having bonding with one another and hearing God's word are always looked forward by everyone. It was really a fun day!



Can I add to my report that PCFFD need sponsors for Fellowship meetings, for the food and transport so that we can continue our Fellowship, and ministering to them. Most of the PCFFD members are really indigent. They have no pension, like in other rich countries, and they are relying on what their familiar can help them with.

Please pray for us and for PCFFD Camp on April 11 - 13. May we be able to evangelize (for the first timer), minister to PWD Christians and help them to draw near to God. Our theme this time is "Trusting HIM"

Sponsorship Needed

These are the two Staff Workers in the Philippines who urgently need sponsors as their sponsors have dropped out for various reasons.



America Acdal (006Staff)

America has been at Hebron for many years. She is currently working as Assistant Pre School SPED teacher with children with degrees of disability. This is a very challenging task and requires skill and patience. America is very committed to her work and suitable for this job.



Teresita Esplana (022Staff)

Teresita (Tess) is a single lady, who is supporting her elderly parents who do not live on the Hebron compound. She is working as a teacher for Grade 5 Deaf Class.

If you wish to sponsor either of these workers, the commitment is \$30.00 per month. Please contact Ruth Beale PCFFD NZ Office P.O. Box 45-105 Waterloo Lower Hutt. Ph: 04 9346785 or 0274927178.