

A Brush with Death



My life in God's hands

David Nightingale

Dear Reader

It was about twelve months ago that a doctor was telling me that I had a cancer – prostate cancer to be precise. There were several options open to me as far as treatment is concerned:

- ❖ The problem could be ignored;
- ❖ I could hope that it would cause me no more than the problems I was currently having;
- ❖ Ultimately I might die of something else first.

There were several treatments including surgery, chemotherapy, isotope implants etc. and possible combinations – all of course designed to get rid of the cancer. All have their problems, journey's into and through unknown experiences. As the cancer had been discovered early whatever treatment was engaged the prognosis was good.

But wasn't God supposed to be looking after me? Wasn't I a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? So how was I 'supposed' to face up to the realities ahead and deal with the events that followed? Of course God has not promised us an easy life simply because we believe in Him. In fact He will have trials and challenges for us so that we gradually develop into people who are truly His children.

It was in that spirit that I decided to write this booklet just before I had my operation, the chosen treatment and to finish it, God willing, during my recovery. I believed that my cancer had to be surgically removed if the quality of my natural life was to be prolonged. So it was that I committed myself to Him who *"is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of: to God be the glory....Amen"* (Ephesians 3: 20/21 TEV)

David Nightingale

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A Trip to Hospital

Only the other day I made another frustrating visit to the hospital. It was a total waste of time and quite unnecessary, but one thing came out of it at least. While I was there I determined to share my experiences with others and write this diary.

As I have regarded this whole experience as one that was under God's control, despite my personal frustration, it may well help others if I share some thoughts and spiritual ideas that have occurred along the way.

It all started...

Where did it all begin? The story of my illness begins about five years ago when having returned from Africa following a Bible Mission visit one or two parts of my anatomy didn't seem to be functioning properly. A visit to the doctor was called for and he sent me off to the hospital for some tests. That time the tests were clear and since then I have been regularly monitored. But last year it appeared that something more sinister was happening.

Really though, I should start by putting my life itself into context. I am a Christadelphian who is trying to live life by

faith based upon the teaching of the Bible, the Word of God. For my purpose this means acknowledging that God is sovereign as far as my life is concerned. His will should prevail in all things and so I seek to fulfil that will, day by day. My life is in His hands, so it is His to give and His to take, should He so choose. I recognise that life is a gift to be used in ways which will give God pleasure: I should not simply be trying to find self-fulfilment.

I came to this conviction years ago, as my parents were Christadelphians. So as a teenager I heard the call of the gospel and followed the Lord Jesus Christ, by being baptized into him, as a believing adult.

Over the years I have had many minor illnesses, each one a reminder of human frailty, so I know only too well that we are mortal creatures. But to

be diagnosed with a critical illness now is something else. When that happens – and that is what happened to me – you wonder “Is it the end?” Then, with second thoughts, you wonder “Is it the beginning of the end at least?” And the soul searching doesn't end there, for you then wonder if you have done anything that might have met with God's dis-favour. A critical diagnosis brings all the issues of life into sharp



focus and at the same time the small things of everyday life have still to be dealt with. All this is part of the process of living by faith.

The Waiting Room

Five months into the year, I had already visited the hospital at least twice for the tests and now was the time for results and yet another examination by the surgeon. As I waited in the reception area, not really wanting to read the typical tatty magazines or the book I had brought, I had a drink of water from the dispenser in the corner. The room was stuffy and oppressive; those who were sharing the Waiting Room with me all looked uncomfortable and ill at ease. The drink was ice cold and refreshing.

It occurred to me that this was like the “waiting room of life”. Every one of us is waiting for something. Time is ticking by and one day we will be told that our time has run out. For we are all getting older, one day at a time.

We all waited – some chatting, some sitting stoically, some reading. It was as if time was standing still. Relief would come only with the summons to attend the doctor and he was running late. Apparently a patient had collapsed whilst with him and this had delayed things whilst the “crash team” had helped the patient to recover. An hour or so passed by. Then the steady stream of patients resumed their progression into clinics and consultations. What would be the message for me;



would it be one of hope?

“Yes, we can help you. It will take an operation, but at the end of the process you will be a new man. And there should be no problem. You are fit, aren’t you?”

Or would the situation be hopeless?

“We are very sorry but there is nothing we can do to help. We will of course make you as comfortable as possible, and you should be all right for a few more months.”

Life or Death?

I guess this marks the two extremes – new life or certain death. Isn’t that where we all are? Life is like a waiting room, in which we try to find useful things to do with our lives. Out of that waiting room there is only one door. It may look as though it offers hope, but at the end of the corridor there is the surgery with a doctor who actually offers only a postponement. The inevitable will come one day: we will all die and, without God’s help, we will die without hope. The apostle Paul once said to believers in Ephesus that before they had chosen to follow Jesus they were in this condition:

“At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Then he added these encouraging words:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once

were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ" (2:13).

How, then, can we share that hope – real, lasting hope, which is guaranteed to bring that ‘new life’ solution we all

crave? It can only come about when we bring God into the situation, and choose the Lord Jesus as our Master Physician. He, and he alone, can cure our deepest sicknesses.

Health and Peace

There are no instant cures on offer, but God can give us both hope and peace. Even believers know that they will die and that they will come to judgement, which could mean they will perish for ever. However, they have placed their lives in God’s hands so that whatever happens to them, He is in control, and everything is subject to His will. Our confidence is in His character, knowing that God will always act out of love. God always provides what is best for us as a loving Father (see Romans 8:28).

Whilst we are waiting for God’s comprehensive cure for all human ills, we can wait in confidence and try to use our time usefully serving Him. That way, life becomes much more than a matter of ‘marking time’, for we have to take the opportunities of life as opportunities for service. Jesus taught that it matters as much how you do things as what you do and that motive and intention are every bit as important. Thus even the little things of life and service come to have meaning as we live by faith.

It makes a huge difference to know



that our lives are in God’s hands and that he cares for us. No matter how skilful the surgeon is, or how many mistakes his team might make, or how many hospital infections might be around, nothing can or will happen

unintentionally. There may be difficulties to overcome; things from which we can learn; results we did not expect; and things we find hard to accept. But we can always be confident that what happens is what is right for each of us. The comforting assurance is that God knows best and always does what is best.

Safe Hands

Once we place our lives in God’s hands, everything belongs to another dimension. For God does not just want us to live here and now: He wants us to have eternal life. This life, however good it feels to us, is limited in time – 70 years and then what?

Beyond the grave, God has promised believers the hope of life everlasting, eternal good health in His kingdom on earth, when Jesus comes. Jesus has already proved that he is a Master Physician. When he lived on earth he could heal the sick, forgive them their sins and even bring the dead back to life. So if he is interested in us we are in safe hands indeed.

All of this brings me to one simple conclusion when we are faced with a serious challenge, to our health or our well being. If we put our confidence in God and entrust our lives to His care, there is nothing to be afraid of!

Waiting and Waiting

I eventually got to see the surgeon and he was quite matter of fact about it. I had a cancer.

He explained all the options. Yes, there was a choice but none of the options was especially appealing. For me there was only one option that seemed right: surgery. That sounded a radical enough treatment to be sure: the cancer would be completely cut out.

The waiting time appeared the shortest too. And, of course, I prayed as I went in, whilst I was in there, and as I came out. More particularly, that evening before we went to bed, my wife and I prayed. I was sure that it was all in God's hands, but I still did not understand what it all meant for my life. It's so easy to confuse a lack of understanding with a lack of faith. Understanding will come as time rolls by: though I might not have too much of that left, as far as this life is concerned.

Another Visit

I was to see the surgeon again. It took a bit of prompting before I got around to ringing the nurse who had been designated as a kind of mentor. That was a good idea and helpful in this instance. The surgeon had said that my case would be dealt with in weeks.

The problem was that the nurse let slip that "URGENT" was written on my file. That was unsettling. Time seemed now to be tickling by and nothing had really happened. I had my scans weeks

ago. Would the opportunity for surgery be lost? Would the surgery be less effective than I had first thought? All went quiet. Well not really quiet. During that time I had seen many people (other Christadelphians) as I tried to continue with my daily service of God, in my ecclesia, in my family and so on. The recurrent theme of their conversation was sympathy, prayer and encouragement.

"We are thinking of you, we will be praying for you. Please keep us informed about what is happening."

I began to feel like the apostle Paul who, after his epic voyage through storm and shipwreck to Rome, was met on the last stretch by brothers in Christ:

"... When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage" (Acts 28:15).

Never have I been so grateful for my brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus who were praying on my behalf.

No Hurry!

The surgeon told me that there would be no harm in waiting a short time. I was reminded again of someone who once said, when all I was waiting for was a cup of tea, "*Patience is a virtue and David is cultivating it!*" Well, I was now!

This all enshrined a great truth. If we need patience then God is not going simply to give it us (gift wrapped or otherwise). Instead He will provide the circumstances in which it can be developed; and we have to learn that, as we

URGENT

proceed with our lives, He is overseeing events, always.

The Day Approaches

The surgeon had told me that the operation would take place about the middle of September. My wife said she thought he said the end of September. Either way, time now seemed to be rushing on to a date – a date I wasn't sure about. It is just like that with the coming of the Lord; and just like that with the day of our death! It has to be difficult to organise your life when there is an important event looming, yet you don't know the date when it will occur. Jesus once told a parable about a man who was busy with plans to expand his business and make more and more profit. Then the message came to him:

"You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20).

Whilst waiting, I had to clear my diary of appointments that could be affected (which incidentally, and in the event, I could have fulfilled). Patience began to wear thin. Had they lost my notes? Had they forgotten me? I rang the nurse again, several times and eventually, after what seemed an age, I got a specific date, first a pre-operation visit and then for the operation two days later. That looked good, seemed all fixed, but then the hospital bug struck.

The Day Arrives!

This long period of waiting reminded me about waiting for the coming of the

Lord. Undoubtedly the Lord will come. Will it be in my lifetime? All the things that are wrong with the world, all life's distractions, can mask the fact that the promise of His Coming is sure. Essentially we have to be patient and remain alive to the possibility that His Coming could be anytime soon. However we still have to continue to serve. There is no value in trying simply to wait.

The very process of living life fully in His service at home and in the Ecclesia is all part of preparing for that great day. It is part of the mechanism for developing us so that we are made ready to spend eternity in His service in the kingdom that Jesus will set up when he returns to earth, to reign as king.

Disappointment

At last I arrived at the hospital only to be told that they hadn't sufficient nurses to undertake our care after the operation because of the latest hospital infection. There were three of us altogether, all keyed up and with nowhere to go except back home! So, back home we went. I was bewildered, my faith intact, but completely unable to understand the purposes of the Lord. What was this delay about?

Maybe there was still a lesson about patience to learn. Maybe this was the Lord's way of protecting us from a super-bug. I reassured myself with the knowledge that God knows what He is doing and, whatever happens, it will be the right thing, all things considered.

Meanwhile I came to realise that every new day I have been given is a gift from God, of His goodness and mercy. It is yet another opportunity for service.



God Knows Best

I get another date for the operation. It's about a week after the previous date when I was sent home from the hospital because of the virus and the staffing problems.

I decide to write this account of my experiences. I am becoming so conscious of all the people involved in getting me well again.

Can you trust them?



How difficult it must be to provide a hospital, a fully trained, suitably experienced team of nurses, a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a theatre nurse, hospital managers, medical secretaries – all of whom have to deal with a group of people who certainly are not at their best and are clearly anxious about their condition.

Sometimes I doubt their competence. They weren't that well organised the first time round: when I was sent home again because of difficulties with the virus. How well will they cope with the operation and my aftercare? I'm reminded of what the Psalmist said:

“Don't put your trust in human leaders, no human being can save you” (Psalm 146:3 TEV).

However, I feel very privileged to have all these people working on my behalf and I hope they will be able to put me right again. What is really interesting is that I have very few symptoms and no pain associated with what I have. It is the doctors who have diagnosed the problem and told me what it means and ultimately what has to be done. So we pray again.

It may seem obvious to you what I should be asking God to do, but I am also conscious of others who are even more in need of help than I. The more you think about it, the longer the list grows every day. There are so many people who are afflicted, oppressed and in mourning. And people like the hospital team also need our prayers, for they often have to exercise their skills in very trying circumstances.

There are so many problems around nowadays that if we try to pray about them all we can feel overwhelmed and we seem to be spreading our prayers so thinly. That highlights the wisdom of the Saviour's guidance when he taught his disciples to pray:

“Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy Name,

Thy kingdom come,

*Thy will be done on earth as
it is in heaven ...”*

Something going wrong?

My illness is a bit like sin. Most of the time we don't acknowledge what is happening inside us; we just go on pleasing ourselves. Then, one day, we wake up to the fact that something is not quite right. It might just be old age creeping up on us; a bad tooth; stiff

limbs after a bit of rigorous exercise; or sometimes it's more serious. But our physical condition is not the only problem we have to face. We have to face the reality of human corruption and eventual death because of a much deeper malady. There's something profoundly wrong with the human frame and here is the divine prognosis:

"As through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Adam's disobedience was the starting point for all of us who have chosen to follow his bad example. All sin and come short of what God asks of us (Romans 3:23). But it is only when something makes us face up to our condition that we even begin to worry about it – just as it was with my diagnosis. I felt all right, until the problem was pointed out to me, and not just the problem but the solution too. God does the same in His Word; for the gospel is about salvation from sin.

While the Bible tells us to face up to the reality of sin, it also tells us that the whole organisation of heaven is available to us to bring about our salvation. Remember that very famous Bible sentence draped over the stands at the last football World Cup?

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

He Died for Us

Jesus suffered pain, and sorrow, just as we might, with some illness or disease we would rather avoid. Then he died on the cross – died just as we have to. The difference was that he died in an agonising way, being taunted and evidently rejected by

those he had come to save. For him death was a merciful release after the agonies of the cross.

But he rose on the third day – came back to life again, this time to live forever! Now he acts as a mediator for us – showing us God's love and bringing us God's forgiveness. Just as I need all those people at the hospital to make me well again, He is there to help us through all the difficult circumstances of life. The difference is that He is totally effective. Heaven's organisation will never let us down. God never fails with anything. There is never any doubt about whether we can be healed (forgiven); and there is no doubt about His promise of everlasting life.

God Knows Best

Trust God, for He always knows what He is doing! I hope that by the time you read this the surgery will all have been successful and that ultimately I will be restored to full vigour. But there is always a chance that my date with the surgeon could mark the end of my life. I have to face that reality. It makes a huge difference, however, to know that my life is in God's hands. So as I come to the end of this diary extract, my prayer has to be, as for Jesus just before he went to his death: *"Thy will be done"*.

And then, of course, my prayers are for my family and for all my brothers and sisters in Christ, that they in their turn might learn to follow Jesus in the way that I have done and hopefully better. Should I survive the operation, when it comes, clearly the Lord has something that I need to learn. And there is still a service that I can offer – if it is only to complete this diary, as a witness of what has happened.

Searching for Meaning

I'm still here and have not gone to hospital yet. From the start of this experience I have tried to approach it by exercising my faith in God, especially as there is so much about it over which I have no control. These things have to be placed firmly in God's hands.

"Let go and let God"

This was what a 'Wayside Pulpit' proclaimed outside a church, but what did it really mean? How am I, as a servant of the Lord, intended to understand this experience? Barring direct revelation from God or voices in the head, the only place to turn is to the Scriptures.

There we can find an authoritative message and some factual examples of the way in which God has worked with people in the past. From there we can draw some clear conclusions, for the Scriptures give us God's help and guidance. The apostle Paul went through some challenging experiences and emerged a stronger and better man, and this is what he wrote:

"Whoever thinks he is standing firm had better be careful that he does not fall. Every test that you have experienced

is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm. At the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out" (1 Corinthians 10: 12,13, TEV).

Without being arrogant about it, I believe this is at least part of the meaning for me. Ultimately this experience is for my eternal welfare and will enable me to associate that much more closely with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, perhaps see more clearly why it was needed and how we can also be victorious over sin and even death.

Paul was also told that he had been given *"a thorn in the flesh"* to prevent him being puffed up with pride. Some say this was a "painful physical ailment" to keep him from being proud. What he needed to learn was:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Counting my Blessings

So what is my personal experience all about? This time of waiting is certainly one of self examination. It is probably natural for at least some of the time to feel guilty anyway, but in Christ this is an opportunity to see that when we repent of our sins and seek God's mercy in forgiveness, God will forgive us. And suffering, we are told, can be one of



the ways that God helps us to become the sort of people He wants us to be. In Chapter 12 of the Letter to the Hebrews we are taught that those who have committed their lives to Christ – by their belief and through baptism – are treated by God, the Father, as His children whom He disciplines (or chastens) for their development. Just think what that means for me:

- v I am counted as one of the children of God.
- v He cares enough about me to try and change my life so that it matches His family characteristics.
- v He wants me to be in His Kingdom when it is established on Earth.
- v He is prepared to forgive all my sin.
- v I am being encouraged to put away my personal sin and live by faith in the grace of God.

Everything that happens is under the supervision of the Lord Jesus, so there is really nothing to worry about, whatever happens.

It's All Over!

I'm out of operating theatre, out of anaesthetic, out of bed, out of hospital. Life starts again! My operation had taken place during the afternoon – I'll spare you the gory details! So by the time I was recovering from the anaesthetic it was already late evening and I didn't see light again until early the following morning when the nurse came round to check blood pressure, temperature, etc. It was rather



like a 'death and resurrection' experience, very similar to those we find recorded in the Old Testament: a bit like Daniel spending a night in the lion's den!

I came to the hospital resigned to "my fate" that we all have to face. We are all sinners, all suffer sin's corruption, so we must all die sometime. In the theatre anteroom it was really quite convivial with the nurse and anaesthetist making cheerful conversation, no doubt as a distraction. They explained what they were going to do and that all would be painless. I was grateful for their thoughtful care and for all their skill which I was going to experience at first hand.

But I was even more grateful to the heavenly Father. In Him through the Lord Jesus, I was lying down in hope, confident of His skill and care. He would be guiding the hands of surgeon, doctor and nurse. So it was that I awoke the following morning – the cancer removed – to the beginning of a new life. Surely this was a resurrection-like experience. God has given me a fresh start, full of hope. What a precious gift life is! How wonderful the Father's care.

Step by Step

Of course, I was soon reminded that this wasn't life in the kingdom of God just yet! The pain had to be dealt with and it was a couple of days before I actually stood on my own two feet again – only to sit down very quickly. I was going to have to take things easy for a while.

A Visitor Calls

Operations are something you don't know much about, fortunately. One minute you are chatting with the anaesthetist, the next thing you know you're back in your hospital bed, wondering what happened.

Those who believe in God know that his angels have a watching brief and an ability to put things right where necessary, and that is a huge comfort

In the Bible angels are not subjects of Church or graveyard art. They are real beings who live in heaven and who work for God in this world. Usually everything they do is unseen, but there are exceptions. In the past they have appeared to men to bring God's message.

Most frequently they have seemed at least initially to be like human beings – it is afterwards that it has become apparent that they are actually God's special messengers created for His purposes. Jesus, himself received angelic support in the Garden of Gethsemane, for we read that: *"an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening him"* (Luke 22:43).

The Psalmist adds this comforting thought, for all God's people:

"The angel of the Lord encamps round those who fear him and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7, ESV)

"Of the angels it is said, 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation'" (Hebrews 1:14, ESV).

We believe these things and yet when someone believes they have had an experience of angels we tend to shy away from the idea. Unfortunately it is true that a great many myths and superstitions have been woven around them even to the point where God himself is sidelined altogether. I believe however I had an experience of angelic ministrations during my recent spell in hospital.

Just imagine the situation. The hospital was locked down, the ward closed because of the current norovirus scare. No visitors allowed. The only people on the ward apart from the few remaining patients were the night staff. The patients including me had all been moved to individual rooms so the

rest of the ward could be thoroughly cleaned.

A Visitor

I was sitting that evening on the bed, reading, with other reading material on the table in front of me including the English Standard Version of the Bible which I had taken with me into hospital. Quite unexpectedly the door opened. In came someone I had never seen before and quietly sat down at the bedside. There were no introductions, a simple greeting



and we launched into conversation as if he had been there all the time. In particular he picked up the Bible, saying, "I've not seen this version before, do you mind if I look at it?"

The conversation continued then along the lines of Bible versions and where we had found them most useful and especially the

message of some of the Psalms. I remember I spoke about those Psalms which seemed to describe the sufferings of the Jews, God's people, even in our times. I don't really know how long all this lasted except that it was a relaxed conversation and eventually my visitor rose from his seat and bade me good night.

It was a few minutes after he had gone that I began to wonder, "Whoever was that?" The hospital chaplain? A new patient who had come ready for surgery the following morning?

Unknown

In the morning I asked about my visitor and no one seemed to have any knowledge of him – the nurses emphasised that there should have been no one on the ward, my fellow patients had had no visitors, no new patients had been in over night. Having eliminated all the possibilities, in true



detective fashion, what was left must be the truth – I had been visited by the Father's ministering angel to bring reassurance in a time of need.

It was the kind of realisation that makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Should I tell anyone? It was a fellow-patient who let the cat out of the bag! We both travelled home together and he immediately began telling those travelling with us about my experi-

ence. He was obviously impressed so I resolved that I would talk about it also.

God at Work

If there was any doubt about the reality of my experience it was better to give God the benefit of the doubt, give Him the glory, than to try to rationalise the experience in some other way. I needed to confess His work in my life and give thanks for it. After all there is another Bible passage which says,

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2 ESV).



Bible Line

Telephone message
for UK readers
Ring 08457-660668

One Day at a Time

What a difference a day makes when you have been through the mill! With some food inside me and the physio-therapist's arm to guide, I began walking up and down the ward with some degree of confidence and I was joined in my efforts by other patients who were in hospital for the same treatment. We encouraged each other on the way.

Fellow-Feeling

Only today one of those other patients has rung me to compare notes – ‘How was I managing?’ ‘Had I contacted the medical services for their ongoing care?’ and suchlike.

Two things have come out of my visit to the hospital I hadn't quite bargained for:

① The sense of fellowship and friendship with those who had a common experience. It may not last long, it may not mean anything, but with these men I have a shared bond which has, at the very least, given me the opportunity to share with them my faith in the Almighty Lord God of heaven and earth and the Saviour He has provided. This is something like the fellowship that there is for those “in Christ” who have even more reason to rejoice!

② The sense of a new beginning and a new life that the experi-

ence has given; it's a fresh start. Yes, most of the things that were in my life before are still there, but the cancer is left behind. Old relationships are renewed with wife, family, and friends. And the idea that the Father has still something for me to learn and to do, before His Son returns. It's a new life beginning from today, every day! What thanks I owe God for His unspeakable gift of life.

On-going

This recovery is not over yet! I came out of hospital with medication and other medical appliances to help me on the way. Other members of the medical service swing into action and there is a plan for the future including exercises to strengthen me and get me back to full strength. So the time of complete recovery is some way off.

Once again, the spiritual lesson is clear. We all need the instruction of God's Word, on a continuing basis. Every day we need to be reminded that God has a plan and a purpose for His world and for His people. And while we await the complete recovery of His creation, we all need the support and encouragement of other believers as we look for that day when the Lord Jesus comes to bring eternal health.



Recovery

Today we changed the car – it was fine and the garage had some very good offers.

Not for the first time, I was struck by all the paraphernalia that was required just to drive a car never mind to own and insure one. The practise, lessons, learning the Highway Code, the test – and then persuading some one to let you drive their car – usually your father! “Drive carefully! Don’t drink and drive! Be back by” And then the next morning Dad would walk round the car to check nothing was damaged.

Oh! How I yearned for my own set of wheels! But when that objective was obtained there were more conditions that had to be fulfilled if I wasn’t going to be a nuisance to everyone else who happened to be using the road at the same time.

Bible Tuition

I remember seeing a film once about Bible reading. It showed a car driver recklessly ignoring all the sensible things he had been taught, speed limits and the like, especially the Highway Code. Of course, as you might expect, there were many disasters along the way, often involving others and eventually the driver was killed and you saw his coffin being lowered into a hole in the ground. The message was – “If you throw away the book of rules then what can you expect?”

If you have to do all that just to drive a car, why should we think its going to be any different for life in general? We need guidance and instruction – a kind of Highway Code for living and God has provided us with that very thing in the

Bible. Perhaps that’s why it is sometimes called the Book of Life! For we all need instruction and practise in how best to live our lives – that’s why we all have families into which we are born and why parenting is so important.

Rules for Life

What has all this to do with my personal situation? I have been blessed with a good hospital experience, the consciousness of God’s guardian care of me the whole time, a death and resurrection experience (when I had the operation) and a full recovery. Thankfully the disease has been removed and in the words of the surgeon, when looking at my results –“They don’t get better than that.” I really do feel that I have been given a new life. BUT ... it’s not immortal life with eternal health. I still have basically the old body with its other failings and weaknesses to remind me of my mortality. And if I’m to make a really complete recovery there are various things that have to be done. As I left hospital there was a whole new way of life to learn about. Just look at this list:

- ✓ Hospital medication to complete.
- ✓ Periodic blood tests.
- ✓ The doctor available if things don’t feel quite right.
- ✓ Calls from the district nurse to check the wound was healing.
- ✓ Visits to the hospital so the surgeon can check his handiwork. I have to say the medical services have looked after me as well as they possibly could. Add to that the concern and support of friends,

wife and family, then I really have been blessed.

- ✓ Specific exercises to do every day – almost certainly for the rest of my life.
- ✓ Regular general exercise. You see, my body has to relearn how to perform certain functions in an appropriate way following the removal of a bit of my anatomy. Because of the loss of that one part the rest of the body has to do more work and become more efficient. Happily the body, in this case mine, is quite capable of making the changes and I am confident of a good outcome.

New Life

Let's just emphasise – without any exaggeration – that the whole experience I have been through requires that I should learn to live differently if I am going to really benefit from my recovery; if I am to be totally delivered (or saved) from the disease. This is equally true of the new life we can have in Christ Jesus and there are some very close parallels.

It all starts with a diagnosis, just like going to the doctor, when we realise that there is something wrong with our health: something that needs urgent attention. We are all in need of the salvation that God has offered to us, because we have the most deadly of diseases. The Bible calls it sin and every human being suffers from it. It is like a cancer that continually eats away and ultimately we will perish unless we undergo radical treatment.

Just like a patient entering the hospital, we have to prepare ourselves for the experience. We need to consult the expert. Once again the Bible comes into play telling us what has to be done and how we have to change our thinking and ways so that the Consultant – God Himself – with the support of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Master Physician – can operate on our lives to spiritually remove the disease and give us a fresh start. He alone can give us a new life.

We will have to undergo a death and resurrection experience to start the new life. Once again it is the Bible that comes to our aid to tell us we need to be baptised. It says this,



“He who believes and is baptised will be saved.” (Mark 16:16)

Notice that word, ‘believes’. When we need to have surgery and enter a recovery programme it is absolutely vital that we believe in what the doctor tells us, especially about recovery. We are going to place our complete confidence in the surgical team. With spiritual things it is just the same. We have to place our complete trust in God and the Lord Jesus, who are the experts in dealing with our problem.

Being baptised is the believer's way of showing faith in God. It is also a personal symbolic experience of death and resurrection. We are buried in water for a few moments, an act which marks the end of the old way of life and the start of the new. It also associates us with the Lord Jesus in his

death and resurrection. (If you want more information about why baptism matters, read Romans chapter 6.)

Recovery Plan

After baptism we begin a new life in Christ. But let's remember that baptism is just the start. Like my recovery from the operation, there is a continuing need to follow a recovery programme. There was a new regime of regular exercise, the support of friends and family and the continued interest of the medical staff. In the new life in Christ these things are mirrored by:

- **Daily Bible reading** (a Bible reading plan is available if you write to one of the addresses on the back of this issue). It is important to be systematic and regular about this, just like my exercises. If you start to miss days, or do the exercises haphazardly, the cure will not be effective, recovery will not be as good. The book of rules can never be thrown away! The same thing really applies to every aspect of the new life.
- **Prayer** is your opportunity to share your concerns through the Lord Jesus, the Master Physician with the Consultant, the Father, about your recovery and spiritual development.
- Finally **the support of a new family in Christ** (Christadelphians – “brothers and sisters in Christ”) is also important.

Where will all the exercises of this new life get you? The surgery I experienced, good as it was, will only prolong my mortal life. One person with whom I shared this experience said that the doctor had told him it would prolong his life by about fifteen years. Be that

as it may! As we said earlier it won't bring eternal life. Nor will it bring certain hope into our lives. One of the things which is often neglected or taken for granted in the practice of human medicine is the patient's hope that a cure can be achieved.

But new life in Christ leads both to a better quality of life now and the sure hope of resurrection from the dead when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven. That brings the prospect of everlasting life and eternal health in the Kingdom that is to be established on earth when Jesus reigns from Jerusalem.



Baptised believers can live in the confident expectation that God, working through the Lord Jesus, will keep His Word. He will never let us down and the cure He offers will finally be totally effective. One of the Old Testament

prophets gives us a glimpse of that life in these words:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31).

Now that's the kind of recovery I'd really like!

David Nightingale

What Christadelphians Believe and Teach



- 1 The Bible is God's written message to man. The writers were instructed and inspired by God.
- 2 The God revealed in the Bible is the only, true and living God, the Creator of all things. He is immortal. The Bible does not teach that God is a Trinity, but that He is a Unity (the One and Only self-existent God).
- 3 God has a wonderful purpose with the earth and with men and women which he wants everyone to take advantage of.
- 4 Jesus Christ is the Son of God (not God the Son). He was born to the virgin Mary by the operation of God's special power, which is called the Holy Spirit.
- 5 The Kingdom of God existed for several hundreds of years in the past when there were kings whom God appointed to rule over His people. It is to be set up on earth again when God's appointed King – the Lord Jesus Christ – returns in person to the earth.
- 6 When Jesus returns – visibly and powerfully – he will establish peace, justice, true worship and right living among all nations. At that time the glory of God will fill the earth.
- 7 The Christian gospel, or Good News, as taught by Jesus Christ, invites men and women to believe what God promises and so live for ever in God's New World. For God will grant his faithful followers eternal life.

- 8 The Bible teaches that we are all sinners. It also tells us that we are mortal (and have no immortal soul) and that we will eventually die. Death is really the end of life and we know nothing when we are dead. We need to be saved from remaining dead. If we do nothing about our situation, we will just cease to exist.
- 9 God has appointed Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind. He lived a life of service and obedience to his Father (God). He taught people about the hope of living for ever in God's Kingdom. He never once sinned. Wicked men killed him by crucifixion (that is nailing him to a cross) and his lifeless body was placed in a grave.
- 10 Because Jesus did no sin, he could not stay in the grave. God raised him from the dead and gave him immortality, which means he now lives for ever. At present he sits in glory with his Father in heaven: the only person ever to have gone to heaven.
- 11 God accepted the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. God will forgive the sins of all who believe the teaching of Jesus and associate themselves with him.
- 12 We show that we belong to Jesus Christ by being baptised after we have understood and believed the gospel and repented of our sins. Baptism, as taught in the Bible, is a complete burial in water. It marks the end of our old way of life and the beginning of a new life.
- 13 When Jesus returns to the earth all God's faithful people throughout the history of mankind, will be raised to receive immortality and will live for ever with Jesus and will be made like him: immortal and forever free from sin.
- 14 The people of the nation of Israel are God's special people. The Bible predicted that they would return safely to their land after a long period of exile and dispersion and that the time will come when they will accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah. They have now returned, which shows that the Return of Jesus is near. It could happen any time now.
- 15 God's Kingdom will begin with Israel (centred in Jerusalem) and will eventually include ALL the mortal population of the earth.
- 16 Events in the Middle East are a sign that God is still concerned with the nation of Israel and that he is working out His purpose through them.
- 17 In obedience to the command of Jesus Christ, true Christians meet together regularly to remember the sacrifice of Jesus by sharing bread and wine. They also strive to live in obedience to the commandments given us by the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles.

This is a very short summary of God's Master Plan with the earth and with men and women. If you wish to know more, please request further information from one of the addresses shown on the back page.

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