

Perhaps you are wondering by now who is writing these words. In September 2011 I turned 81. My mind goes back over the years of my illness. These past 20 or more years have not been easy. However I trust that in some measure, at least, there has been something in my life, which has born fruit to the glory of God.

## My childhood

I was born in a little village in West Yorkshire, England. I was the middle one of a family of seven children – four sons and three daughters. We were poor. Life was hard, especially for my dear mother who did her best to make sure there was something to eat and we had some clean clothes to put on. On the whole my health was good. I was 9 when World War II broke out.

Until I was conscripted into the army soon after my eighteenth birthday, I was a choirboy in the local church. However, I never heard the Gospel until I was in the army. There in Egypt, at the Suez canal, I became a 'born again' Christian. I was nineteen years old at that time.

## God's call to be a missionary

It was also then that I felt the call of God to be a missionary in Northern Africa. After twenty years of service there together with my Swiss wife and our six children, we returned to England and settled in a small village near Northampton. During our time there I became ill with 'Polymyelitis' (inflammation of many muscles). The doctors seemed puzzled by this little known disease. I was put on a very strong dose of steroids, which was then slowly reduced to 50 mg a day. The pain, especially in my left leg, and pro-

gressively in my other limbs became almost unbearable at times. Sometimes I felt I couldn't cope with it any more. Many dear Christian friends prayed for me and with me. I was anointed with oil, according to James 5:13-16, *"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

Nothing seemed to change. The pain persisted. Eventually I was given morphine every 12 hours. Nothing seemed to change. I needed more painkillers. I had short periods of blessed respite, when the pain died down and I could live again. But it didn't last.

## What had I done wrong?

I searched my heart. I felt God had forsaken me. I must have grieved him beyond measure. During these dark days, when I felt so cut off from God's love and mercy, my dear wife and family and kind friends prayed for me. They helped me through these dark days.

After much heart searching I cried out to God from the deepest depths of my being. I was broken, I wept. In this condition I gave my heart and life, my whole being over to him in a new way. I felt again the presence of Jesus and he wrapped me up in his love. He filled me anew with his Holy Spirit. I felt like a new creation. He poured his life into me as I let go and let God take over.

It was not that all the pain had gone or that I didn't need my wheelchair any more. It's just that my Lord and my God has taken over. He is in charge. I can sing and smile again. I know he loves me and I love him, my Lord and Saviour.

**"Oh, how I love Him, How I adore Him, Jesus, my Lord ..."**

## He is my strength. He holds me up.

And when the going is tough, I hold on to his word, because I know he is there and he cares. *"Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (Isaiah 41:10).

We are happily settled in a local church, where the people have taken us into their hearts. Here we enjoy mutually serving each other, practically and spiritually. We just feel at home and loved and can give ourselves to the older and young members so easily and feel fulfilled in spite of our weakness and age.

I believe that God's most gracious healing-force, spiritually and physically, can be afflictions. Suffering is never without a reason. If we can say "Yes Father", then our Lord and God will create something wonderful, a 'something' that will transform our life and our surroundings, just like Asaph wrote in Psalm 73. In great suffering he tried to understand God's dealings with mankind. However, God gave him a new vision. He started to look at suffering in view of eternity and said, *"I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me into glory"* (Psalm 73:23.24). Bernhard Cookman

## I believe God can heal

I have known Bernhard Cookman for well over 30 years now. Looking at his life and the way he has experienced God's presence has made me understand something of God's individual dealings with his children in a deeper way. I believe God can heal, but more important than being healed is that we learn the lesson God is teaching us. When we face illness or pain, it is not that God is punishing us as though he enjoyed inflicting pain. No, he allows difficulties to come our way to draw us nearer to him, so that we may experience closer fellowship with him.

## A 'thorn in the flesh'

Even though we do not know for sure what the 'thorn in the flesh' was, we know that the apostle Paul faced severe suffering. He even *pleaded with the Lord to take it away from him*. God did not respond by healing him. But through suffering Paul was learning that *God's grace was sufficient for him and God's power was made perfect in weakness*. When Paul received this answer he did not carry on praying for healing 'by all means'. No, he responded to God's personal answer and said, *'That is why I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. – I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak (physically), then I am strong (spiritually)'* (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

In Hebrews 11 we find a list of heroes of faith. They experienced God's help in wonderful ways. However, the list closes with the following words, "... Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Oth-

*ers were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:35-39).*

As Christians living in an evil world we are not exempt from suffering. But God is in control and he loves us. Jesus fully understands us. He promised never to leave us. So we can confidently trust in him and one day in heaven we will understand what it all meant. PK

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Life 4 you

No. 06

# Blessing through pain

My life has known much pain. Many times I cried out to God to set me free from it, saying words like this, "God I can't take any more – please take this pain away". I believe he can completely heal me and give me complete freedom from the pain and weakness in many of my muscles throughout my body – especially in my arms and legs. Yet, while I go on believing, I am learning to thank God for my present condition, which serves to remind me of how dependent on him I really am.

With David, the king and psalmist I can say, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn your laws."* Day by day I am learning to cast all my cares and anxieties upon him, according to 2 Peter 5:7. He will not – indeed cannot – let me down. He is God. He knows what is good and best for me.