

CHAPTER 14

GRACE UPON GRACE

A few months after starting the legal proceedings to separate, I was living on my own trying to support two children on a meagre salary. I was now looking at a season of navigating life as a solo parent, with my focus continuing to be on how I could best support the two most important people in my life, my children. My separated husband had lost his job and was fighting his own battles. His family had closed ranks around him, and I was the problem.

So I got moving, prayed and just put one foot in front of the other, day by day. The first thing to tackle was finance. I needed to create more income. I went to Work and Income to see if I could get some temporary financial help from the government to help with my rent and to put food on the table. They came up trumps with a portion. I went to my current employers and asked if we could take on another school, so my hours could be increased, which they agreed to. This was going to take time however, but it was another step in the right direction. There was light at the end of the tunnel. I was so grateful for the time my dad had taken to help me budget all those years ago. Those skills, to live within my means and steward what I had, were gold for me in this season.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

Christine, my stepmother, finally lost her battle with cancer at the end of November. She lived eleven years longer than expected and had been such a blessing to me. I had said my goodbyes when she was in the hospice about six months previously, so I didn't fly home for the funeral. She had such a faith and inner strength about her. Always so considerate and so kind. The light had gone out for her when Dad passed. She missed him heaps, and I felt a real peace for her when she went. Her fight was over, and so was mine. The last of Dad's estate was released, which my ex-husband tried to have added into the estate. Christine passed after we had officially separated though, and by the grace of God, I had \$160,000NZ to put towards a new home.

I could not believe all the blessings that came my way in this season. The help and support of true friends, and the love and human kindness that poured out in every facet of my life was supernatural. All I did was stand. I stood for what was noble, right and true. I got off my backside, and God made a way where there was no way. I had no understanding of this at the time. I was praying to God, especially when the kids had to go for their weekends with their dad. I was a mess. I had nothing left; the only way was up.

My life was a mess, too, bitter and broken. It was really tough for everyone. Navigating it was a nightmare. I called the police out on more than one occasion as I believed there were times when the children and my ex-husband were all at risk of unwanted domestic violence. Emotions were raw for us all. It was super tough for him and the children, having never had to navigate day-to-day living together on their own. As the tension was so high, we had to swap the children over outside the police station. He couldn't hold his tongue or temper. It was awful. I wouldn't wish the situation on my worst enemy.

This pain and experience is part of the reason I am so passionate about prevention, supporting people and helping them navigate their differences before they get to the edge of the cliff like we were. I had lived for three years on "it will get better when...", going to counselling and seeking help. It all ended up in a heap because it was too little too late. It is interesting when I look back. The signs were there for years. All

the traditional methods of help—the GP, counsellors, marriage guidance—were all too little too late. If I had known then what I know now, we could have avoided so much pain, anguish, destruction and grief, saving massive amounts of money while lifting our health and wellbeing.

This was a season of digging deep, finding the real me. The fire within started to burn. I was starting to walk in my superpower and own my journey. I had to create a whole new world and narrative—one that was real—from the inside-out. With the loss of Dad, Christine and now my marriage, all my safety nets had gone. My whole world had been turned upside-down. Now I had to start turning it the right-way-up.

I had to go from victim to victor.

I had to shift my thinking from things happening to me to things happening for me—and actually to things happening because of me. Again, I had no idea this was the process at the time. I was in the thick of sorting it all out. And without knowing, God was paving a way for me and had gone ahead of me.

By March, the children and I had moved into a tiny rental, thankfully with heaps of sheds and a paddock for the pony. Martha got to open her bedroom curtains in the morning to see her pony looking at her waiting for his breakfast. There were so many good times in and amongst all this. Buster, the labrador, loved it as he got to sleep on the beds at times too.

Threaded into this journey was the annual Project K Graduation for my work in July. We invited all the sponsors and supporters, those who had sown into the programme at the beginning. From the Kiwi Adventure team who ran the three-week adventure at the beginning of the programme to the businesses and speakers who had given their time to share their wisdom and insights with the students during the Community Challenge and mentoring phase of the programme. Proud parents, students, families and mentors came. It was a wonderful time of celebrating the students' and mentors' achievements, reflecting on all the wins, gains and progress, and speaking the future into being.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

I loved putting this event together, those on the board were always very helpful on the night, serving, connecting, thanking and congratulating the students and mentors. On this occasion, Kev (one of the Kiwi Adventure team) turned up early and offered to sort the tech out for me. What a knight in shining armour as this really was my weakest link.

I could not take my eyes off him all night. There was something about him. I focused on the people in the room and the wrapping up of our fourteen months together. It was always bitter-sweet as saying goodbye to these wonderful young people after what we'd shared was always hard. Kev, Dave (Kiwi Adventure) and Paul (Board Chair) were there to the very end of the evening, helping clear up and load trees and stakes into my car. I hinted that I'd like to go for a drink to Kev twice with no response, so home I went.

I messaged Kev the following morning to see if he would be free to help me unload the boot of my car as the stakes were too heavy for me to lift on my own. He said yes and he'd pop round after he had dropped his son at the bus station to go off to camp for the week. My children were with their dad for the week in Taupo as it was the school holidays, so I had let things slide a bit at home. I had half an hour to tidy the place up, have a shower and look respectable. Kev arrived early, and I was still in the shower! It was alright. It was only Kev. I invited him in and asked him to make himself at home and put the kettle on and I'd be out in a minute.

He helped me unload the stakes, and we chatted. I wanted to convert the pigsty into a shelter for the pony, and there were a few odd jobs that needed doing. Neither of us had children for the week, and Kev had to pass my door most days to go to work. He brought me real coffee every day on his way and popped in on his way home. We spent quite a bit of time together that week, chatting, getting stuff done, and tidying things up. I invited him for dinner on Friday, made a huge effort to make a curry from scratch (which was more like a stew) and he never complained.

I quite liked this man. And so as we sat on the sofa that night, I told him I would like to kiss him. No response. Ah well; I'd either blown it or it wasn't meant to be. The kids would be back the following day, and this week of connection was over anyway. It had been a great week, and we'd got lots done. I was looking forward to the kids coming home. All was well.

Then Saturday morning he arrives with a coffee and a big kiss. His kiss worked a treat. And so the journey of adventure began.

In life, we need to be yoked on our dreaming BIG, the desires of our hearts in Chapter Nine and values in Chapter Seven. My biggest stumbling block in my marriage had been a misalignment in these two key areas. The phrase "ignorance is bliss" is so not true. I believe "ignorance is a nightmare," and when you don't know clearly what your vision and values are, things can go horribly wrong.

If I was going to embark on another relationship, I had to be super clear on where this was going and ensure we were on the same page. There was a huge amount at stake here. I was not prepared to go round the mountain again and stuff up a second time. I believe a lesson is repeated until learnt. So I needed to find the learning, grow into the new understanding and line myself up on the right runway.

Reflect and Reframe

I was starting to understand some key principles at this time. The importance of knowing my priorities as shared in chapter Ten as well as who my real friends were. There had been a real shift during this season. Those I thought would stand with me didn't and those I didn't think would, did. It was here that I experienced how to create healthy relational boundaries around my heart, as in Chapter Five.

It was so important to me to keep my love on. I am super grateful to my lawyer, who told me to stay true to who I am, to stay focused on what is noble, right and true. It was the best advice I could have had and kept me pointed in the right direction, rather than being sucked into all the arguments and battles.

No more fighting.

I needed to be better, not bitter. I desperately wanted to keep my heart soft and not turn hard and cold from the circumstances I was in. I had to find the good, the win and the learn in this. I had prepared myself for being on my own with my children. I had no intention of being in a relationship. I was certainly not going to make the same mistake again. Nothing was going to change until I changed.

This season was one of real blessing. I have always believed that what goes around comes around. It may take a while, however. If we focus on what is noble, right and true and have faith, the upside-down world gets turned the right way up. Through my darkest hours came the brightest light. I have never felt so physically alone and yet so loved as I did during this time. Packing up the life I had dreamed of and the family home, saying goodbye to my marriage, were times, I pray, that no one has to go through. It's raw, it's ugly and it broke me. However, in the darkness, I found freedom. I no longer had to conform to the ways of the world, and I could start afresh.

This time was filled with love and pain as I cut away and let go of the old and stepped out in faith into the new. I had nothing left. I felt like I had been stripped bare, and it was amazing. I had nothing left to lose and everything to gain. The only way was up. This was just the beginning.

Dear Reader

I encourage you to reflect and reframe your own past experiences. If we look at our past as something bad, we carry that baggage into the future with us. I encourage you to leave the old baggage behind, as I did and pick up the new luggage that is set before you, full of love, peace and joy, so you can have hope and a future.

We have talked about the God/Tissue box in Chapter Two. I am genuinely in tears as I write this, feeling the pain of so many people reading this book, carrying past hurts and pain that is not yours to carry. It no longer serves you, and it is time to let go. Another old

saying is: "Let sleeping dogs lie." I implore you to let go of the pain, let go of the words and let go of the hurt. Write it down, rip it out of your notebook and your heart, and ask God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to give you the 'Great Exchange', the truth over lies as we mentioned right at the beginning.

It is your time to walk free. To step out of the old and into the new. Stepping out of a loveless marriage full of guilt, shame and fear and into a new life with a hope and a future was one of the most exciting, exhilarating time of my L.I.F.E.

I believe the best days are ahead of you. I can assure you, when you let go of the past and walk into your destiny and become the person you were uniquely designed to be, it just gets better and better. Welcome to a whole new world and awakening fulfilment of your life, where you are loved, celebrated and fit together with those around you.

Call to Adventure:

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (*Hebrews 11:1, NIV*)

This was my season. Out of the darkest moments in my life, where I was broken and had nothing left, I prayed. I was on my knees begging for the pain to go away, for the wrong to be righted, for the nightmare to end. In that darkest time of my life when I felt the most alone, I found L.I.F.E. I looked to where my help comes from. I didn't know it, but God had a plan for me, a plan for my life, that plan was "to prosper me and not to harm me, to give me hope and a future" as in Jeremiah 29:11.

If you are going through a tough time in your life or you are unable to see the wood for the trees, I encourage you to look up and ask for help. Have faith in a Father who loves you to the end of the earth and back, literally. So many people see God through the lens of their own experiences and past relationships. All about performance and being let down.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

As you'll find out in the coming chapters, I thought I knew who God was. I had no idea who Jesus was. Let alone this weird phenomenon, the Holy Spirit, who I have since discovered we are wired for. However, these three, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who all work together as one, have been the key for me to a life full of joy, peace, patience, kindness, love, faithfulness, goodness, gentleness, patience and self-control. The more I have leaned into the "three plus me," as Graham Cooke phrases this relationship, the more clear I have become in who I am and why I am here.

I encourage you today to explore the relational aspect of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Consider God as your dad, who as the creator of the world, has everything at His disposal and wants to give you the best gifts.

Consider Jesus to be your big brother, the one who also wants the best for you and mediates between you and your dad when you stuff up. You can go to your big brother with anything. He will never condemn you, leave you or forsake you. He will hang out with you, ask you some questions, share His wisdom and show you the way. And, in case that is not enough, when we hang out with these two, we get a bonus—the Holy Spirit. He's my favourite right now. Teaching me, guiding me, pointing me in the right direction and encouraging me to get this book done, so we can get this message out to you.

What if you had a dad who wanted to give you the best gifts? What if you had a big brother who loved you so much, he would lay down his life for you? What if you had an in-built guide, counsellor, teacher and coach to keep you on the right track, in your lane, where you are pumping each and every day, winning in the game of L.I.F.E. moment by moment, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year?

I had to step out in faith in this season. I was not walking with God, nor did I have any idea what any of this was about. I was, however, believing that by some miracle I would bounce back and that my children would be OK.

I encourage you to seriously consider how this would change your life. How these intimate relationships, so close to your heart that they are one in you, would affect your life while you are physically here on earth and beyond. Enjoy.

“Be strong and brave. Don’t be afraid of them. Don’t be terrified because of them. The Lord your God will go with you. He will never leave you. He’ll never desert you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6, NIV)