

CHAPTER 6

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

I was living with my dad and his wife Christine for the first time at the age of twenty six. That wasn't on any of our agendas. My poor dad and Christine. I took over their spare room, their loft, and hijacked Dad's office and computer. I unpacked and got on with what needed to be done. I went to the 'dole office' and claimed "job seekers allowance"—I was now unemployed and needed some funds to buy petrol to go to job interviews etc. I started searching and applying for jobs locally. This process took three months.

I slept, healed and spent time getting to know Dad and Christine. This was an incredibly special time. I was on my knees, feeling the lowest I had ever felt, and they welcomed me with open arms and loved me through it. They never once judged me, condemned me or brought up my shocking past behaviour. I had been vile to Christine as a teenager, being pompous, arrogant and rude. I wanted nothing to do with her. I had my mum and my dad, and she was nothing to me. I had made that quite clear in how I spoke to her and in my actions towards her, no hugs, limited interaction etc. Christine was always kind, gentle and full of patience. As a deputy head of a primary school, she had possibly seen it all. However, I have no doubt it would have hurt.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

I had a chance to talk with Christine about how they met, Dad's grief and brokenness at the time, and how he filled that hole with charity work, often for kids. I learnt that Christine couldn't have children, which had been her heart's desire. She'd spent forty years as a teacher, and then as deputy head in primary schools, pouring out her love, wisdom and insight into other children, while not being able to have her own. I remember feeling awful, filled with guilt and shame at how I had treated them. There was this lovely lady who wanted children of her own. She had been so close and yet so far away as Richard and I were both piled off to boarding schools, and I had been far too busy with the horses and ponies in the holidays to spend any time with them.

Christine went to the local church, and Dad went sometimes too. I believe it was this connection with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit that brought them through this time in the wilderness. They stood together. They forgave. They honoured and respected and made the most of what they had. They both loved the garden. Dad loved making ponds and rockeries. They enjoyed a good barbeque and having family (Christine's mum) around. They had each other, got on with their lives and made the most of what they had.

During the day, I was going flat-tack. I was filling in the booklet that the 'job seekers' give you to track what jobs you are applying for, what action you are taking, what calls you are making, etc towards seeking employment. It was a great time reflection for me, and it was where I learnt the value of tracking progress. Onwards and upwards. As long as I was doing my part and taking action everyday, I had complete faith (not that I was having anything to do with God at this stage in my life) that all would work out in the end. It always had and always did. Out of my darkest hours, the brightest light always shone.

Then I got a job interview with "Racing Green," a high-end clothing retailer whose brand I aligned with and related to. I was so excited. I drove to Manchester (about an hour from Dad's), to their nearest store, chatted to the store manager there and bought a full outfit for the interview. I was taken on as the store manager for the new store opening in York. Wow! I couldn't have asked for more. Right in the

middle of one of the most iconic and beautiful cities in the UK. I was at home.

One box ticked and restored, I now had a job that was a much better fit. I was back in my happy place with a brand I connected with and believed in. It was funny how every business I have worked for, I loved their people, product and ethos. I had a few more boxes to tick, like finding the right home, helping Alexander find work in the UK and finally looking to put roots down. I had been following the money and was busy climbing the career ladder. I had experienced heaps, lived in some beautiful cities, made friends, and yet it had all seemed so empty. I had a real sense of wanting to settle, of being with people and the land I knew. While I had been busy chasing what I thought was my dream, it had always been surface level, going from one promotion to the next, one city to the next. I was ready to come home and be in a place where I felt that I belonged. With stunning countryside, with people who say it how it is, and with family.

Alexander and I had now been together for just over a year. He had gone back to Courchevel for his last ski season before looking for a “proper job” and settling down. He came back from France, and Dad and Christine welcomed him with open arms. Dad had worked out what Alexander’s background and skill sets were and put him in touch with one of his great friends, Steve, who invited him to play cricket for his club. Steve and Gary owned Cropwise and were avid cricketers, so his interview was on the cricket field. Alexander was an outstanding wicketkeeper and a strong batsman. They tested out his sportsmanship and attitude, and they employed him from there.

We were making progress; things were looking up for both of us. We both had full-time positions with solid career opportunities. His gift with people and hospitality coupled with his agricultural background were a great fit for the business. And while he potentially looked like a great match, if he didn’t work out they could let him go after the cricket season. Now all we needed to do was to find a place to live, so Dad and Christine could have their house back. Boom, within a month, we had a beautiful little cottage to rent in a delightful little village just outside York.

Reflect and Reframe

Looking back, reflecting on these chapters in my life from a healed heart, has been such an interesting journey. I gave my life to Jesus six years ago, and my whole world has changed.

I was driven by fear all my life. Fear of not being good enough. Fear of not being able to support myself and stand on my own two feet. And fear of not being loved or liked. I spent forty eight years of my life trying to prove myself, climbing the ladder, competing with others in the hope of filling the empty hole in my heart, hoping that each external step would get me to a place where I was safe and secure.

I had no idea that this was a never-ending cycle. I was going round the mountain again, trying to achieve what I thought would make me happy. Then dropping down to my base level of happiness again, only to repeat the same behaviours and end up in the same space.

Then six years ago I chose another way, another path. One where I discovered all I wanted was on the inside of me, not on the outside. My upside-down, or inside-out world was literally turned the right-way-up or inside out, with one action. I said yes to Jesus. And instead of looking externally for my validation, I looked inward to find my sense of value and worth. For the first time in my life, things became clear in my heart, and then in my head. My world, slowly, but surely, started to make complete sense, and as it did, everything that had held me back started to wither away into nothing.

I started by finding an app for my phone, and Nicky Gumbel walked me through reading the Bible in a year. This book is the best guide book on the planet for understanding people, history and how we have not changed in over 6,000 years! The wisdom, insight, and discernment I have learnt along the way has been next level. I love how many of the leaders in personal development have read the same book. I have had massive revelations from this. Jim Rohn, Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins and Dan Sullivan are a few who spring straight to mind.

I look back now through the eyes of Jesus and God's Word with an inspiring perspective. I see the richness, love and joy throughout every

‘peace’ of the puzzle. The pain, loneliness, hard work and exhaustion are all truly in the past and have no hold on me any more. I am, as Dr Benjamin Hardy would describe it, “being my future self now.” There are three main keys to freedom, inner peace and personal success. These are relationships, forgiveness and tracking progress.

Building and Growing Healthy Relationships

I am learning now to see how important relationships are. The power of love and connection is so valuable. We are never alone. He says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” God always blesses us with the right people at the right time in the right place. He has sent me people to warn me, to pick me up, to give me tips for an interview, or a listening ear. There is always life around us, birds singing in the trees, new buds or blossoms, something in our lives is always moving. Whatever we focus on expands. We can focus on the good or the bad. The choice is ours. Whatever we focus on gives us more. The psychological term is *prospection*. I can look for the good in people, and I will find it. I can look for connection and love, and I will find it. Or I can look for the opposite; both are there. The choice is ours as to what we pay attention to and what we grow.

Pursuing Forgiveness

In this chapter of my life, I discovered the power of forgiveness. It released me and set me free. Unforgiveness keeps you focused on the problem and decreases your capacity to love and be better every day. It is easy for me now, as I realise the battle isn’t with each other; it’s upstairs (in our head and/or in the spiritual realm). It is funny—whenever I feel things have been unfair, unjust or offensive, I have to remind myself, “Life isn’t fair, just or lived on my terms.” Then I go the step further and ask myself, “What am I feeling and why? What piece/peace am I missing? What is the learning or upgrade that will transform or shift the atmosphere and change the outcome?” After all, as Nelson Mandela declared, “I win or I learn’.

I believe that the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. I am no angel. I can get myself into all sorts of upset at times. The important thing I've learnt is to be aware of my emotions. To answer the question "What are they telling me?" take a step back, and consider what is behind the emotions (often this is the root of the pain). To go through the "Life, Insight, Freedom, and Engagement" system, in Chapter Five in my head, and then come out the other side with the Truth. Because the Truth will always set me free. Free from emotions that hold me back. Free to forgive myself and the person or situation I am troubled by, so that I can love not hate. This perspective keeps me grounded and looking up, not looking down with my head in some ideal.

Tracking My Wins, Gains, Learns, and the Things I Am Grateful For

What the enemy meant for evil, God will always turn for good. I was on a roll. I had everything—a great job (next move would have been regional manager). I was living the dream—skiing and having a great Kiwi boyfriend. And then crash, you're out. I had to ask for help, and my family came up trumps. I went home, to my roots, back into the fold. There is a great book called *Peaks and Valleys* by Spencer Johnson. Its theme is making the good and the bad times work for you, not against you. I got to go home. I got to be with my family again. I was taken out of the storm, and I was back home. I am so grateful for this experience. I learnt heaps and was free.

Life is not easy. However, it is simple and straightforward. He will always guide you. We all make "miss-takes"—they are a win, because we are "taking" action and we are giving life a go. We are in the game and heading for an end goal. The key is to never give up, to press on towards the prize set out before us, leaving behind what is past. As human beings, we often beat ourselves up for "failing" instead of celebrating that we put ourselves out there and gave it a go.

The poet, Robert Frost, declares, "The only way out is through. And the only good way through is together." Someone shared that with me during this time, and it stuck. We have to go through stuff to get to the other side. Without losing my job, I would never have had the

beautiful restorative time with my dad, got to know my stepmum or created a wonderful life back home in Yorkshire. I would have continued on the hamster wheel, making work my anchor and idol.

If we just keep going, moving forward and taking bold, courageous action, we will overcome. We will make it, we will step into our zone of genius and field of favour, and become the amazing beautiful people we were always designed to be—Living lives full of joy, peace, contentment, love and excellence.

Dear Reader

The power of the reframe, the capacity to see the truth or good rather than the bad or lie, massively shifts not just our thinking, but also our lives. They are both there; however, you get to choose what you focus on. I'd love to challenge your thinking. So many people I speak to think God is an ogre, that He's unkind and far away. If the world has so much pain and suffering in it, how could there be a God? I encourage you to continue on this journey with me as I share my inspiring perspective on who God is for me.

The God I know is all about relationship and intimacy, not about rules and regulations, or judgement and condemnation. He created the whole earth and everything in it. He is the King of Kings and I also see Him as my dad. I passionately believe my earthly dad has always wanted the best for me and my brother. He had a massive heart and did a huge amount for others. It may also be why I find it so easy to relate to God as my Father who wants the best for me. As His daughter, everything that is His, I get to claim as part of my inheritance. I am blessed to now see the beautiful people He put around me in each season. The love, blessing, grace and favour that was upon me in these times. I was far too busy looking and thinking about me, me, me to even notice. I believed "if it was meant to be, it had to be down to me."

I encourage you to look back and to see where something didn't go to plan in your life, and then see how it turned out for good. The lie is

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

there and the truth is there. We get to choose which frame we look through as we reflect. The German philosopher Søren Kierkegaard suggested:

“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”

So many of us are so busy rushing and striving towards the next goal, the next thing, that we forget to look back and see the growth, the lesson, the learning, the love and the blessing. If I hadn't “lost my job,” I would not have gone home or had the healing time with my dad and Christine. I would not have been buying houses, putting my roots down, feeling like I belonged and settling again.

Out of our darkest times the brightest light often shines. God's hand was in my life all the way through; even though I wasn't walking with Him, He had my back and was walking with me. It absolutely astounds me to this day. He didn't stop the bad things from happening. He used them to step me up, for me to grow and become a better version of myself, with more empathy, understanding, drive and determination.

Looking back over my life now with forgiveness for the lost soul that I was, desperately trying to find my way in life, to make a difference, to be loved, to be seen and heard, has released a level of love and compassion I never thought was possible.

I am now so grateful and thankful for all of my seasons, whether they were what I expected or wanted or not, they always turned out for the good in the end. You may find, like me, when you look back that you cringe at some of the things you said or the attitude you had. I cringe now at how arrogant, judgemental, opinionated and entitled I was.

I am so grateful for the grace so many have blessed me with, which has softened and opened my heart. I love my fabulous family, the amazing people I have, and have had in my life, and am thankful to be where I am today. I love the fact that I have hope and a future, that the best days are ahead of me.

Call to Adventure

Here are my “Power of Three” actions that have helped me to massively shift my life out of neutral or sometimes reverse, into drive. The Power of Three are **Relationships**, **Forgiveness**, and **Tracking wins**.

Relationships

Who has loved you unconditionally? Not for what you do or have done for them, but for who you are. Who has been there in your life to feed into you without expecting anything in return? Who has stretched out their hand to lift you up in your time of need? (Many of these people may have been on your list from the last chapter’s call to action.) I didn’t see all of this at the time; It is only on reflection that I see it now. This has been a consistent thread throughout my life, one of love, compassion, kindness, and gentleness. We so often get caught up in the drama, the problem, the victim, the “woe is me,” that we miss the good stuff.

Consider who and what you are looking for and relating to. Are you relating to the problem or the promise, the mess or the message? Are you looking at the pain or looking to reign? It is time to look up, to lift your gaze from what is in front of you and focus on what is ahead of you. If you are struggling to see the good, reflect on the coaching in these chapters, or come and spend time with me. I love reframing and table-flipping, turning people’s upside-down worlds the right-way-up. It breaks my heart to see people stuck, trapped in shame, guilt, anxiety, stress, depression, or not being good enough, all because they haven’t been given the strategy, skills, or tools to see the truth in love.

Forgiveness

This is one of the most powerful keys to relieving stress, anxiety and pain. I encourage you to take time today and consider if there is anyone you need to forgive. Are you blaming someone or something for your sadness, hurt or injustices? Now is the time to let it go. It is only you who is suffering. The other person may be completely

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

oblivious. It's time to set yourself free so that you can walk in love, peace and joy and live again. Write it down, tear it out of your book and your heart, and pop it in the God Box/Tissue Box. Let Him wipe away your tears and bring you the joy, peace and love that are your rightful exchange.

Tracking Wins

I encourage you to start tracking your wins, the things you are thankful for, the things that bring you joy. And to celebrate yourself for taking bold action. I write these down in my journal at the end of every day. It makes a MASSIVE difference to my outlook, productivity, and ability to stretch and go further day by day. When I first started this exercise, I could only think of a few things in my day that I was joyous or thankful for.

Today, I can often write a page or two. My circumstances may not have physically changed that much, but the way I frame them has. God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. Even when we don't see it, He's working. Even when we don't feel it, He's working. He never stops, never tires of working on our behalf, with our best interests at heart. Even when we don't acknowledge Him. He's there every moment of the day, waiting for you to see Him and be with Him. Tracking my wins and giving Him the glory is my way of saying "Thank you" for all He has blessed me with. And it's crazy—the more I thank Him, the more I seem to be blessed with.

"But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33, NIV)