

GO FOR IT!

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CHGRL

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Chapter One

Go for it.....it's the only way to live

I got fired last week from my job as a part-time lecturer in a Bible College, at the age of 72.

It wasn't because of the economic recession, or because of my age, or because of a moral failure, or because I'd failed to do a good job, or because I've violated some fundamental doctrine of the Christian Faith. The general opinion was that I was the college's best lecturer.

I was fired because of a book I had written, which was controversial, and the college authorities didn't like it.

I knew this might happen. I am sure they were trying to do the will of God as they saw it. But I knew I had to write the book out of obedience to what I believed God has said to me. I had tried to avoid it, I'd argued, I'd delayed, but in the end I knew I had to follow the path of obedience to God which I started to walk more than fifty years ago.

That path has often been difficult, painful, costly, lonely but I would do it all again, and more, because there is nothing more satisfying than to be able to look back and say with the Apostle

Paul "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith". I am not claiming that I can yet say that. But I want to be able to do so. I want to finish well. I don't want to falter at the last hurdle.

But if all this sounds scary forbidding to those just beginning the race, or just hitting the first big difficulties, let me say an emphatic **'NO'**.

Let he shout it, **'NO'**. Life is meant to be an adventure, an adventure with God. It is tackling it half-heartedly that brings discouragement and disappointment. *"Faint heart never won fair lady"* says the old expression. Nor do faint hearts discover the wonders of God's Kingdom here on earth.

But the adventure doesn't come from chasing the latest fad or fancy that hits the Christian Church, the latest spiritual craze that comes to town.

It begins, for me at least, from sitting in the presence of God in some quiet place, far away from the distractions of the everyday world, and listening to him. Have an open bible in your hand, but don't stop there. If your heart is open to God you'll hear some amazing things, that may be scary, may be contrary to all you've dreamt for yourself.

You will need to test what you hear, but if your heart is saying *"Yes, Lord I want all that you have for me"* he will reveal **his** heart to you and give you his own confirmation.

That confirmation can come in many different ways, as I plan to illustrate in this book. Don't move until God tells you. But don't hesitate when he does.

Many Christians do hear God speak in direct ways, through prophecy, through vision or dream, or through that still small voice in the depths of your being, but faith falters. Another voice tells us to take the safer path, the voice of reason, or cultural

conditioning, or church tradition. But the safest place is rarely the one that looks the safest.

The only safe place is to be up front with God, marching in step with him. The easy road is actually the hardest road and often the wrong road. ***We were made for adventure.*** Bad choices often make life very dull and unrewarding. We are not the frail creatures that Satan often tells us we are.

Visiting a friend one day I found him doing maintenance work on a large six-cylinder Chevy car. It belonged to an elderly missionary lady I knew. I asked him what was wrong with the car. "Nothing really" he said "This car just needs to be driven". It was a powerful car that was made to be driven hard down a highway.

That's us. John tells us, in his gospel, *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"*.

Paul tells us that we are *"more than conquerors through him who loved us"*. The Christian by definition is STRONG not weak. In Ephesians 6 Paul describes the battle Christians are involved in. The Christian life is a battle. We have an enemy, and he is strong. But there is nothing in that chapter, or anywhere else in the Bible, which suggests we are weak or to be pitied.

Nothing suggests that Satan is going to win. His ultimate defeat is already sealed through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul keeps on telling us to be strong, and to stand our ground. He only tells us to do that because he knows we can, through the power that is in us.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says to this young man who has a tendency to give in to his fears, *"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline"*.

So the message of this book is "Get off your couch, stop whining and **GO FOR IT. YOU'VE ONLY GOT ONE LIFE - LIVE IT**".

A few weeks ago I watched on Sky TV the funeral service of Jade Goody, the London east-end girl who had become a TV celebrity. It was on the box for five hours and I watched it all.

I was riveted. Jade was a colourful character, but few would have said she was a nice person or a good person. She had created a national scandal on a TV reality programme by her crude and racist remarks, and been ditched from the programme. She had kept herself in the headlines by her antics and had gained a following by her in-your-face attitudes.

Then at the age of 27 she discovered she had terminal cancer and had only a few weeks left. As a divorced mother of two small boys she determined to use her reputation to make as much money as possible to provide for them after she'd gone.

The media grabbed the opportunity for sensational publicity. Within the space of a few weeks, in which she suffered considerable pain and disability, she planned a huge wedding to her new boyfriend that equalled that of a movie celebrity.

Totally out of character she got herself and her boys baptised, and then she planned a funeral that got the media attention usually given to an important State occasion.

It was amazing. The crowds, some of whom had slept out all night to get a good viewing spot outside the church, the black gospel choir belting out popular spiritual songs, the wreaths the like of which had never been seen before. One, made like a huge marmite jar, taxed the florists to their limits. They were all statements of a woman going out with a bang and not a whimper.

Even though the media played it down, the church service made it pretty clear that Jade had a genuine encounter with God in those final weeks. Jade had achieved iconic status with her

determination to squeeze her final opportunities on earth to the full.

My values are different, but I want to go out in the same way. Yes, of course it's what happens beyond the grave that matters most. But I want to be able to give a good report of what I've done here in this world right now.

The life I'm describing is one in which faith and obedience are the two biggest ingredients.

There's an old gospel song which says it well; *"Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey"*. Faith is not an emotion or feeling which you try to rekindle in difficult times. Faith is acting on what God clearly says and does in your life.

Quoting the prophet Habakkuk Paul says in Romans 1:17 that *"the righteous will LIVE by faith"*. It's what the Christian life is about. It's the essence of Christian living. It's what makes the difference between being a spectator and being a player.

Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Nothing delights God more than simple childlike trust from his children. We all hear from God, and receive instructions from God, but so often fear of consequences gets in the way and causes distrust. Just as distrust can destroy human relationships, especially marriage relationships, it seriously harms our relationship to God.

A couple of years back a pastor friend asked me to speak at a day conference of his church leaders. For one of the talks he asked me to speak about the greatest lesson I have learned in my Christian life. It didn't take more than a few second to determine what that would be.

There is only one thing we really need to fear in life. Psalm 110:11 tells us what it is. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning*

of wisdom". To quote another old hymn, "Fear him, you saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear".

This kind of fear causes you to stand in awe of God, to marvel at his greatness, beauty and love in such a way that the thought of not doing what pleases him becomes crazy, irrational. We trust him and obey him because he is God, but also because it's in our own very best interests.

Hebrews 11 gives us a list of the most amazing people, who did brave and remarkable things, but few of them knew the significance of what they were doing. Most were ordinary folk when they started off in life, Bedouins like Abraham, shepherds like David, farm boys like Gideon, or most amazing of all a prostitute like Rahab.

The one thing they had in common was faith in God. It was that, not what they did, that got them into the Bible record and makes them famous four thousand years later. **GOD SAID IT...SO THEY DID IT.**

A few days ago I was at the weekly meeting of my church home cell group. I joined this group quite recently because I want to be part of something small and simple, where a few Christians friends share their lives together centred on Jesus. Somehow we got into debating different aspects of eschatology.

We are part of a very varied congregation with people from different ethnic groups, social class and a smorgasbord of theological belief. It's a great church, mainly because the leadership has concentrated on the things that matter most, the things that unite us and not the things that could divide us.

I had made the comment the week before that if we were ever unfortunate enough to have a church forum, at which we discussed out theological differences, it would probably be a disaster. In the relaxed atmosphere of the house group we unwittingly started to do that; most of the group not realising what

different backgrounds we come from.

Like most occasions when Christians discuss end time events it wasn't helpful. I said too much and pushed my point of view too much, and I went home feeling miserable. At one point I made a plea that we stop what we were doing because we have this incredible way of concentrating our thinking and energy on the less important things.

The Christian faith and the Christian life are essentially very simple. It is encapsulated in the words of John, the apostle, as he winds up the message of his gospel; *"These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"*. Or as Colossians 2:6 puts it *"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him"*. We received him through faith and we continue in the same way. Living in him, walking in him, is as simple as it was first coming to him.

But we have an incredible propensity to complicate things because we are natural doubters. We tell ourselves *"It can't be that simple"*. We are masters at inventing obstacles and we are prone to keep on raising questions. We want to know things that we actually don't need to know. **What we actually need is to respond in faith to the things we DO know**. We have so many opinions that they prevent us simply taking God at his word. Sometimes we need to shut up and just stand in wonder in His presence.

The more complicated we make everything, the more we get far away from the joyful experience the Christian life is meant to be. The Pharisees did that. The average Jew in the time of Jesus was burdened by hundreds of rules and regulations that God had not laid down; and dotting 'i's' and crossing 't's' that made nonsense of what God really wanted from his people.

Jesus stressed that it's in being like little children that we enter the kingdom of heaven, that it's the meek who inherit the earth

and the poor who receive the gospel gladly.

I've lived in Africa for most of my adult life. Every day I walk down the street, go to the shopping mall, and mix amongst people whose culture and ways are very different from mine.

The black folk walk slowly, often very slowly and frequently it irritates me when I can't get past them. The white people for the most part rush around at twice the speed.

We whities tend to criticise our fellows for taking such an apparently lazy view of life. We imagine that we are more productive, more organised, more progressive.

I'm pretty certain it's the opposite. If only we could see ourselves properly we would see that it's us who've lost the plot. My black brothers and sisters have much more time for their friends, and for people in general, much more time for hanging out together.

When I once asked some young African evangelists who worked with me what they liked to do on a day off or on holiday they replied "*Visiting and spending time with our friends*".

I have worked and fellowshiped with a lot of African young people. I have felt ashamed at seeing how much closer they get to one another. They know secrets about life and God that I only occasionally enter into, because they give time to the things that really matter. It's the Martha and Mary story, of course; those who see life as primarily *doing* and those who see it as primarily *being*.

There's a lot of talk at the moment about the 'emerging church'. The description seems to cover a wide spectrum of movements and emphases. I've read only a limited amount of the literature and am wary of some of it. When you get to 72 years of age you've seen some fashions and fads come around more than once. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says "There is nothing new under the sun". Only the labels are new.

But I do know that there is a wide yearning for something different. We've had the Charismatic renewal, and tremendous things have happened, but at the end of the day many feel empty and unsatisfied. Worried leaders try to pump it up again. Prophetic words tell us that 'this is the year when it's going to happen'. That in turn produces cynicism. We've been there, seen that, got the T-shirt.

So there's a massive drop out from organised church life.

In the small town where I live I hear a lot about house-churches coming into being because people are longing for simplicity and authenticity. But it's very easy to make the same mistakes as others in the past, thinking that it's in the way we 'do' things that we will satisfy our longings. It's not. It starts by individually getting back to the walk of faith, and then moving forward in faith together, as the Israelites did when they left Egypt, following the cloud and the fire.

I'm writing this at a time when life is pretty difficult for me because of some choices I made. But I'm still glad I made them. I'm glad because of the encouragements God keeps giving me in the midst of the battle.

The last thing I want in my seventies is to be put to bed, with a nice nurse to pat me on the head and say soothing things. I want adventure still. But not adventure just for adventures sake. That can lead us up blind alleys.

I have a goal. Hebrew says of Jesus that it was because of the *'joy that was set before him he endured the cross'*. I want the joy that comes from bringing pleasure to the King.

Some people get mad with me because at an age when I should be a sober senior citizen I keep jumping out of my rocking chair (yes, I've got one) and doing some very un-senior things. I have a propensity to do radical things, push boundaries - someone

has said - sometimes things that shock.

But it's because I believe with all my heart that the Christian life is a life of faith, and that means a life of faith-produced action. Faith is ACTING and LIVING on the basis of what God says and does.

GO FOR IT, IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE.