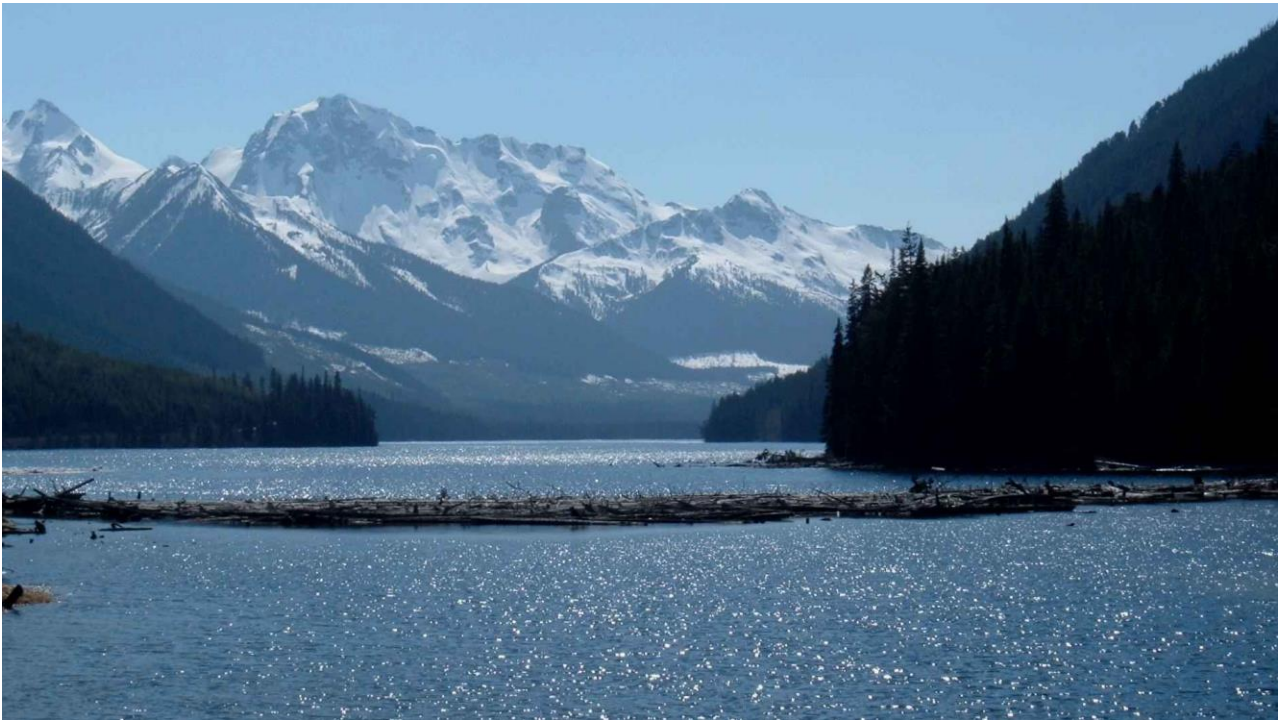

Seeing God in Everything



Our God creates and sustains this magnificent world. He is in everything! and I want to be constantly aware of *seeing* Him, looking for Him and recognising Him in all things from the creation around me to my own, personal life. I remember as a teenager on a Truth for Youth camp, our Youth Leader would play a game similar to “I spy with my little eye”, but instead of picking the first letter of something he saw, he would name the object, and we would have to come up with Biblical references to that thing, such as cloud, the colour purple, acacia tree, etc. Of course, it became a competitive ‘knowledge’ rivalry, but the concept was to relate everything we saw to something in scripture. Apart from sharpening our memory skills, it taught me to look for God in everything we see or do. When I see birds – their beauty just for me to see, I think of Him and think of where birds are written about in scripture or are symbolic of something. When I learn from my children, or see a child dependent on their parent, it reminds me that I am a child of God and how blessed I am to part of His family. When you see a sheep or a boat or a donkey or a leek or red wine or a coat or a mountain or a hand or someone’s eyes . . . I have learned to be alert and aware to what God is showing me and teaching me. It’s a different outlook or attitude to life. But, in order for me to remember a verse, or think of a scriptural connection or association, I had to have that knowledge in my head to start with. This obviously takes time – studying, listening, meditating, reading and praying. Just like the wise and foolish virgins had to take time to

crush olives for oil and trim their wicks to prepare their lamps¹. It takes time, effort and above all, a desire to look for God and Jesus in our daily lives.

Everything ...

I have come to firmly believe that my Father is actively involved in everything I do – both in the big things and the small inconsequential things. I find it incomprehensible that a God whom I'm blessed to call Abba, Father² and who loves me more than I am able to understand or imagine³, would or even could be disinterested or uninvolved in my life. To some people this may seem so obvious, but for others "time and chance happens to everyone"⁴. I think that trusting the LORD with all my heart, not depending on my own understanding and seeking His will in all that I do, God will show me which path to take – in everything – however big or small⁵. I agree with David when he said to God:

You have examined my heart and you know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! (Psalm 139:1-7)

Personal prayer

I grew up with the notion that our prayers are based on the structure of the Lord's Prayer – sort of a check list of things to include in a prayer and as a child there was not much personal impact but a more global, remote outworking of God's plan in my life and the world. Today, I find such distant, impersonal praying quite difficult as it appears more and more to me to be an intellectual and verbal expression rather than heartfelt groans that can't be expressed⁶. If I'm walking and living and doing and saying everything in the presence of my Father, with my King beside me, then I am sharing with them the minutiae of every day as well as the big changes that occur.

¹ Matthew 25:1-7

² Romans 8:16

³ Ephesians 3:20

⁴ Ecclesiastes 9:11

⁵ Proverbs 3:5-6

⁶ Romans 8:26

I haven't come to this point quickly or easily – it's been a gradual realisation of the length and breadth and height and depth of His love⁷ which I only really began to appreciate when I became a parent myself. The strength of the love and protective feelings I have for my three sons made me wonder: If a mere human being can love a child so much, then unfathomable in its vastness is the love that the Creator of the Universe and of every child must have. My expression of love is small in comparison to the extravagance of His love. So, if I, as a parent, care for my children and don't give them stones and snakes⁸, but encourage, and guide and assist and involve myself as much as they will allow, how much more will our Father give us good gifts to bring us to His kingdom, if we ask Him⁹? He wants me there so desperately that He even allowed Jesus to be tortured to show me how much¹⁰.

Privilege

Another way of looking at this great gift is to realise how exciting it is to have this privilege of God as a loving, caring Father and what it means to me on a daily basis. God loves me. He knows my name¹¹. He wants to be with me in my ups and downs¹². He wants to know everything I do and say and think, so I tell Him in an ongoing conversation in my head and heart through the day. I visualise Him walking down the hospital corridor with me and sometimes I beg Him to hold my hand because I can't do this anymore, and I remember "I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me¹³". It doesn't matter how big or small, I can do it through and with His strength. Or I think "ALL things work together for good to them that love Him¹⁴" – not some things, or big things, but everything. Please don't think this means that only good things happen to those who love Him: I think it means everything WORKS together for my good – my spiritual good – and no trials for the present seem pleasant, but rather painful¹⁵. Since I believe God loves me and wants me in His Kingdom, I am learning to be content with whatever situation He puts me in¹⁶.

⁷Ephesians 3:18

⁸ Matthew 7:9-10

⁹ Matthew 7:11

¹⁰ Romans 5:1-11

¹¹ Exodus 33:17; Isaiah 43:1

¹² Psalm 139: 1-4

¹³ Philippians 4:13

¹⁴ Romans 8:28

¹⁵ Hebrews 12:11

¹⁶ Philippians 4:12

Life's examples

Another example of how I have experienced God in the everyday, was when I bought an Optometry practice, I believed it was a gift from God - it was His Practice, and I was managing it for Him. Every patient who came through the door was a gift for which I said, "thank you". Every time I had to pay accounts I'd pray and there was always just enough money in the bank to pay the bills. That computer sure got to hear many a prayer of gratitude! It's not always stress-free when one has staff to support and loans to pay, but I always trusted that God would guide and bless. I also tried to think of every patient that sat in the examination chair as Jesus. If the King of the world was sitting in my chair, I would do the best, most thorough eye examination possible. I would be as kind and patient and respectful so that:

"in as much as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me". (Matthew 25:40)

Obviously in your life, the situation is different, but the principle is the same. Every person you interact with could be 'one of the least of these, my brethren' which means you're doing it for Jesus. What an honour! But also, it keeps me fully aware that I can't go anywhere that God isn't – the depths of the ocean, up to the heavens, in light or in dark¹⁷ – He is always there with me, holding me fast. It gives me a feeling of strong security and comfort knowing that if He is for me, who can be against me?¹⁸

God touches the life of those He loves

I learned to recognise how big our God is and how He touches the lives of those He loves and are doing His work, while working on the Community Outreach Program Trust in South Africa. (This is a program of preaching and outreach to the poor, the fatherless and widows, and our neighbours in the community – a 'touch in order to teach' concept). We met together once a week to report back on what had happened and plan for the week ahead, and after opening in prayer – which was always for guidance and direction (not for blessing our already-made-decisions), we would go around the table and report back on just one "God moment" in our week: one instance where we had seen the Father working directly in our lives or the project. Sometimes it was hard to limit ourselves to just one! – like when the city council person attending a meeting was not the person

¹⁷ Psalm 139:7-12

¹⁸ Romans 8:31

we had asked to meet with, but God had sent the perfect person, with the right knowledge and connections for the request we had. The list of examples is endless and every week we were all amazed at the power of His love and generosity. We quickly realised that we could think big, outrageously big and be blown away by the outpouring of the Father's Grace – I'll open the windows of heaven and there will be so much you cannot store it¹⁹. We set goals for His honour and glory, and we all grew more in faith and passion and excitement for Him and His work, so you can well understand, that when my husband, Mark, had his employment moved to Sydney, Australia, I was absolutely devastated to be leaving this behind.

My questions

What on earth was I going to do for God in Sydney? I was terrified of taking three impressionable teenage boys to a society way more liberal and progressive than South Africa's was. I didn't want to leave my ecclesial family. I didn't want to leave the outreach work. I didn't want to sell my beautiful home, or the Practice God had given me. We tried everything in our power to fight against the decision: we looked at other employment opportunities, but we would have had to move cities anyway; everything we commented on to Mark's company they merely offered more money to fix until it got embarrassing. Every way we turned we felt like God was blocking us. We were told our house was a 'niche market' and it would be difficult to sell – we got 4 offers. I was told the Practice would be difficult to sell in the economic climate – I got 4 offers. Everyone in the community (not ecclesial members) said how hard it was to go to a place where you know no-one or the culture, but they had no idea that I had a whole network of Christadelphian family, some of whom I had already met through the mission work in South Africa. It was so clear to me that I was 'kicking against the pricks'²⁰ like Paul had done. One cannot fight against God.²¹ I knew I would lose. I can remember the specific moment in the Sunday meeting when I was oblivious to the service, arguing with God and tears pouring down my face, when I realised I was being like Paul and fighting against Him, and I needed to be more like Abraham and "leave my native country, my relatives, and my father's family, and go to the land that God would show us"²² and trust that He knew what He was doing and why.

¹⁹ Malachi 3:10

²⁰ Acts 5:39

²¹ Acts 26:14

²² Genesis 12:1

God has reasons

Looking back now, I can see some of the reasons He has brought us to Australia, and I sure do know He's with me each and every step of each and every day. Which brings to me to my career change and how God has worked with and through me. My motivation is to be Jesus to those I meet, in particular, the hands and feet of Jesus to the vulnerable and advocating for those without a voice²³. I wanted (and still do want) to work with older people to fulfil part of 'pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction'²⁴. In Western society 'widows in their affliction' to me means any elderly person in their affliction, marginalisation, loneliness, grief, financial difficulty, health concerns or any pain and suffering. I have never forgotten an exhortation I listened to about 40 years ago when a brother said he would hate to be standing behind Mother Theresa at the judgement seat because she would show him up so badly. I researched her life and motivation, and how, like Jesus, she gave of totally of herself and her possessions for the poor and for the dying who could never repay her. "Do good and give without expecting to be repaid"²⁵. She is an example to me of an ordinary person who did extraordinary things for her God, and I want to do the same.

Change in direction

When we came to Australia, I knew I didn't want to re-register as an Optometrist to practice here since opening a new business in a city where you have no professional contacts or patient relationships would be difficult, so my only option would be to work for a chain in a shopping centre with long hours and evening and weekend work. My family was more important than that, and I'm not enthusiastic about the business model of impersonal service in these chains with financial targets to meet rather than the patient's best health care to deliver. It has always been important to me to give the best, most useful service to the patient, rather than upselling everything to them to meet a target. So – this option was closed, and I had no regrets. I had loved my work because of the people interaction, and I was sure God would provide.

I began volunteering at Christadelphian Aged Care and did their Pastoral Care training and later was certified at College in Pastoral Care & Chaplaincy. At the same time, I got a 3 morning a week position as a personal, private carer for a gentleman injured in a car accident. Little did I know

²³ Psalm 68:5

²⁴ James 1:27

²⁵ Luke 6:35-36

how many skills I was learning - especially patience, compassion and understanding of aging and disabilities. I absolutely loved both jobs and when a position became available at Christadelphian Aged Care, and my gentleman moved out of Sydney, God opened another opportunity. I worked for 5 years in one of the Care Homes for 100 residents that included a dementia specific unit. I did an online course to educate myself about the condition and did another short course on palliative care. These courses led to an offer by the Australian Government promoting education in Aged Care. I was able to complete a fully financially supported Degree in Dementia Care. I had no idea at the time of accepting this offer that three years down the line I would be applying for to Sydney University to study a Master of Nursing and that this free, initial Australian degree would be the grounds on which I was accepted (because my previous tertiary education was way more than 10 years old). God always has a plan, even if we don't know it at the time²⁶.

All that I am ... I owe entirely to God

I managed to work full time and study full time and my experience in Aged Care, disability Care and Community work all dove-tailed together in a way I could never have foreseen. All my work experience, life experience and spiritual growth have met together. All that I am, what I have learned and what I have, I owe entirely to God. Paul says to only boast that we are in Christ, and Jesus says that we cannot do anything of our own initiative or authority without Him²⁷. Was it easy? By no means! I struggled with balancing God, family, work, church and a social life. There were as many exuberant highs as hysterical lows. Was I spiritually on track the whole time? Impossible in this mortal body! My life isn't perfect, but I try to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus and where I'm going. This helps when I can't see the big picture or understand what it is God wants me to learn. He has kept me humble through violence experienced in Africa and resulting PTSD, health 'thorns in the flesh', with children I beg for Him to touch their hearts and bring them to Himself, with three retrenchments . . . I could go on. I had three 'smash-and-grab' attacks, we were held at gunpoint to take our new car in our driveway when our children were babies and we had 4 house break-ins for theft. I really struggled with my body responding with terror and my mind saying, God will never leave you nor forsake you. I've woken in the night with heart pounding and sweating in fear and been absolutely furious that I can't control my body's reactions. Where was my faith?! I remember on one occasion when my husband was away on a

²⁶ James 4:13-16

²⁷ John 15:5

business trip and I had three small children to look after, we had a break-in to our home while we were at the Memorial meeting. I figured someone else needed the stolen items more than I did, and least we weren't at home when it happened, and we were physically safe. It didn't stop me feeling incredibly vulnerable that night and I went to bed clutching my bible tightly to my chest as a physical reminder that God is always with me. I had to learn to recognise that God created my body to react that way, and that faith and love are a living, growing part of my relationship with my Father. It doesn't come fully grown but needs to be nurtured and encouraged and supported just like any other relationship. I think I subconsciously prefer not to dwell on the negative - too much pain and vulnerability there. I've been in situations I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, but I'm glad in retrospect I went through them because of what I learned, but I don't like to dig around there - it's too sore. So, I focus on the positive and move forward and leave it in the past where it belongs and keep praying to be malleable clay²⁸ that He can use. I want to be a vessel for honour²⁹ and show the world I'm proud of who I serve.

Palliative care and being with people who do not want to die alone

Pretty much everywhere I go I speak about my passion for Palliative Care, especially end-of-life care – to be with people who didn't want to die alone (I've held people as they die), to be with loved ones in their grief, to show love and compassion and just be a supporting presence in someone's time of need. My nursing studies added to this, in that I was able to add medical help to the emotional and spiritual support training I've done. At one student placement I asked the hospital manager if she ever needed any staff, I was willing, and she offered me a part-time job immediately. This led to more part time work at a bigger hospital where my manager there said to the post-grad recruitment team that they “would be crazy not to employ Cathy” when she graduated. I didn't even have to apply for a position – God was guiding and showing me what path to take. I was allowed to choose which ward I wanted – palliative obviously! – and started in the Oncology/Palliative ward. After a year, I started exploring other options for Palliative community care, which is my long-term goal: to support a person to die at home, if that's their preference, and be there for an inclusive experience with the whole family, giving holistic care: medical, social, psychological and spiritual care. I prayed about one position I was particularly interested in, and after much discussion with God and my husband, we decided it wasn't the right

²⁸ Jeremiah 18:4

²⁹ 2 Tim 2:21

time or place for that particular adventure. About two days later, as I was driving to work, a woman I met a couple of times in my nursing, rang me completely out of the blue, and offered me the exact job I had been telling everyone I was working towards in the long term. Wow! I was so excited that God had handed me this opportunity, unlooked-for but most definitely wanted.

I started a new chapter in March 2023: working in a 19-bed hospice, training for a year, studying a specialisation in Palliative Care in between, and God-willing, if Jesus isn't physically here with us, then next year I will be able to begin my community care service. I knew I was in the right place when on the first day of work as I waited in the reception area, I noticed a big plaque indicating that the building had been constructed "To the Glory of God". I grinned and said "Thank you. I know I'm in the right place for You".

Retirement – ever?

Do I want to retire sometime? Not really. I don't think we ever retire from loving God and thanking Him for everything He has done for us, and this is my way of doing this for Him. As long as I have the mental and physical capacity to care, I want to continue. I dream of sitting in a rocking chair one day as an old lady, watching the beauty of creation in the ocean, but at this point, I can't imagine doing that all day 😊. I know My God is always with me. Jesus promised he will never leave us nor forsake us and went on to say, "and be sure of this: I am with you **always**"³⁰. I believe it and have seen His work and power in action in my life, every day.

As Paul writes in Ephesians, Christ has made his home in my heart as I have trusted in him. My roots grow down into God's love and keep me strong. And I have come to a growing understanding of how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love for me is³¹.

I pray some of you may be helped by my discussion of my love for my Father, how I try to look for Him and His strength and search for His presence continually³² in everything around me, both big and small, the good and the bad.

Cathy Strachan

³⁰ Matthew 28:20

³¹ Ephesians

³² 1 Chronicles 16:11
