

# TESTIMONIES *of a* GOOD GOD

**THE TRUE STORY OF  
AN ORDINARY MAN  
WITH AN  
EXTRAORDINARY  
GOD**



*"HE'S STILL THE  
GOD OF MIRACLES"*

**BYRON VAN DER MERWE**

TESTIMONIES  
*of* a GOOD GOD

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# Contents

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Hearing God

1. Destruction or a Defining Moment?

2. The Tammie Factor

3. On a New Mission

4. The God Who is Above a Recession

5. Walking Through Fire

6. Standing for Victory

7. Protection, Healing and Deliverance

8. Supernatural Provision

9. Our Words are Powerful

10. Tools to Help Renew Our Minds

11. Conclusion

12. Make Jesus the Lord of Your Life

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About the Author

# Dedication

I dedicate this book to my beautiful wife Tammie, our wonderful daughter Hannah, my parents, and my brother Grant and sister-in-law Kerry. Thank you all for always standing with me and for all the support. I love all of you deeply. I would also like to thank Tammie's family for loving me and for making me a part of their family.

I also dedicate this book to Thomas Crickett. My friend, you were an inspiration and a great man of God. You may not be here on Earth anymore but we will meet again in eternity. I want this book to be a testimony of God's goodness to your family, even if it's just in a small way. So 25% of the after tax profits of this book will go to helping support your family. Love you Thomas.

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Thanks to everyone else who has already read this book and encouraged me to take a step of faith and publish it.

# Introduction

**T**his book is the result of a 16-year pursuit of God. It is the story of my life so far. My walk with Jesus and how He has come through for me in seemingly impossible situations. Having lost my sister, experiencing heartbreak after a failed relationship, nearly losing my brother and facing many other trials, I pray that you will find this story encouraging and faith building.

My prayer is that through the testimonies you read, you would not see me but see God, and see God for who He really is. He is a good God. He loves you, He will deliver you, He will cover you and He will protect you.

My desire is that through this book you will truly understand that with God nothing is impossible (see Matthew 19:26). I've seen first-hand that this is true, even when life hasn't always gone the way I wanted. Looking back over my life, the hand of God is so prevalent. He has remained so very close to me even when I wasn't aware of it.

Even during times when I was bitterly disappointed and life didn't seem fair - HE brought me through, and I have come out stronger and more convinced that God loves me unconditionally and that He is a good God.

I would encourage you to take this book as a testimony of what Jesus has done for me and begin to prophesy the same victory over your life (see Revelation 19:10b).



If God did it for me, He can do it for you. Not that God is a formula. The way He has worked in my life may not be the way He will bring about victory in yours. Even the teaching chapters (Chapters 9 & 10) at the back of the book are tools, not rules. These are things God has shown me to keep me walking in His freedom. Ask Him to show you what will work for you.

I wish there was a simple answer to overcoming all of life's struggles. I haven't found there to be a quick "microwave answer" so to speak, but I do know the One who knows all the answers and has the solution to all of life's difficulties. His name is Jesus and the more I've gotten to know Him, the more grace and wisdom I've received to walk through life victoriously in every situation.

The Bible is not only the word of God but IS God (see John 1:1-5) and the Holy Spirit makes it come alive. Just learning or memorising the Bible without the Holy Spirit, in my experience, has been very unfruitful. However, I can honestly say that the greatest victories my wife Tammie and I have seen, have been in those moments where the Holy Spirit has highlighted scripture to us. We have meditated on those scriptures, taken communion over them and stood in agreement that God would honour His word. We took those words as our own and stood on the word of God (the Bible) until we saw breakthrough.

Some breakthroughs were instant but some have taken a few years to see complete healing or victory. Even now, we are still trusting for and waiting to see victory

and breakthrough in certain situations. God is the same yesterday today and forever (see Hebrews 13:8). What God has done for us in the past, He can still do for us in the future. I have no reason to believe that the same God who brought me through into victory then will not continue to bring me through into victory now.

Truthfully, there have been times when believing God and trusting His word were hard. Especially when the situation seemed so opposite to what we know the Bible says. But the more I walk with the Lord, the more intimately I know Him. And the more I know Him and His word, the easier it becomes to walk in victory every day.

Tammie and I are just normal, everyday people. We don't speak Greek or Hebrew. We are two Christians who are relentless pursuers of His word and His presence. In a way I suppose we just have simple faith - what we read in scripture we have chosen to believe. The more we have believed the word of God, the more we have been able to navigate through life's challenges.

I pray that through this book God will give you a greater desire and passion for His word and that He will show you that He is still the God of miracles.

He wants to call you into a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him. The closer you get to Him, the more clearly you will hear Him. In Him is the solution to every problem you will ever face. Like I said, God is not a formula; He wants a relationship with you. His victory is not hidden from you, it's hidden for you. God already has a blessed plan for you.

I encourage you to stop limiting God whilst asking Him to bless your plans. Find out what His plan for you already is and jump into it because it's already blessed. We are victorious and Jesus paid the full price for freedom. Now let's take hold of it by faith and move into more of the freedom that Jesus has already given us (see Galatians 5:1).

# Hearing God

**I**n this book I speak quite a lot about hearing God. I'm not talking about hearing an audible voice or anything like that, although that may happen for some people. I'm talking about the everyday relationship with God that is available to every Christian that has made Jesus their Lord.

The Bible is filled with accounts of people hearing and speaking to God. God spoke with Adam and Eve. He spoke to Moses face to face like a friend. God spoke to Joshua, to Samuel, to Nathan, to Solomon, to Elijah, to Saul who became Paul, to Ananias, to Stephen, to Simeon and many more, Old Testament and New Testament. (See notes below for scripture references).

In the New Testament, Jesus promises all of us the Holy Spirit, who will show us all things and remind us of everything Jesus has said to us (see John 14:26). If God speaks, and the Holy Spirit is God living in us and having a relationship with us, (see Romans 8:11), then it makes perfect sense that we can hear from Him and talk with Him. God is alive. People that are alive, speak. Dead people don't speak. To have the Holy Spirit in us yet never having him speak to us is strange to me and is not congruent with God's word. If we believe He is alive then we must believe that He speaks.

Jesus also tells us in John 10:27 that His sheep know His voice and will follow Him. Psalm 23:1 describes the

Lord as being our Shepherd - to lead, guide and protect us.

As the children of God, we are His sheep and He is our Shepherd. In the same way that sheep know and trust their shepherd when he calls them, we should be able to recognise God's voice when He speaks and then we should follow Him.

Notes: Genesis 2:15-20, Exodus 33:11, Joshua 1:1-3, 1 Samuel 3:4, 2 Samuel 7:4, 1 Kings 3:5, 1 Kings 17:8, Acts 9:4, Acts 9:10, Acts 6:10, Luke 2:26

# 1

## Destruction or a Defining Moment?

I was born in South Africa to amazing parents. I was the middle child, having an older brother and a younger sister. Growing up we went to church, but for me at least there was no relationship with God. Most Sundays I would pretend to sleep in as long as possible so that I did not have to go to Sunday school. One of the few memories I have of church back then is that the pastor spoke about hearing God talk to him. At the time, I remember thinking, “God doesn't still talk to people.”

Our lives as young children were fairly normal I suppose. We were a middle-class family with only my Dad working, and at times, there was “more month than money.” Our home environment was good, nonetheless, and both my parents loved us very much. Life however, was about to change.

When I was twelve my sister Lynda began to suffer from very frequent migraines and headaches. She was eight years old at the time and after a few doctor appointments, as well as couple of weeks of constant headaches, they decided to investigate further.

About a week later, my parents said we were going away for the weekend to the beach. That Saturday morning, my mother and sister stayed at the

accommodation, and my Dad, brother and I went down to the beach.

My Dad sat us down and said he needed to tell us something. He said the doctors had done various tests and discovered that my sister had a brain tumour. It was really big, and the doctors needed to operate as soon as possible. They had scheduled her for an operation the next week. The operation would take six or seven hours and she had roughly a 30% chance of survival.

How are you supposed to respond to news like that? At the time, all I could think about was how selfish I had been with my sister, how I always made her sit in the middle seat of the car and that now she may be dying. It's funny what goes through your mind when you are in shock. My brother and I both said we understood, but who at any age can really comprehend that kind of news?

The next week we were introduced to her doctor, and he said that he would do his best.

My sister was very calm. She had believed in Jesus since she was a little child; she would never let my Mom or Dad put her to sleep unless they first prayed with her and asked Jesus to look after her.

As I recall, she went in for the operation on a Saturday. To be honest, I don't remember a lot of the day, I only remember wondering if she would die and then my parents telling us that she had pulled through. The doctors had removed as much of the tumour as possible

but were concerned that if they removed all of it she would be left with permanent brain damage.

She spent a long time in the hospital and when she was released, she and my Mom moved into accommodations at the hospital in Durban, where she was receiving radiation. My Dad, brother and I stayed in Pietermaritzburg, about 60 miles from Durban, where he worked and where we went to school. But we spent the weekends with my Mom and sister in the flat in Durban.

The radiotherapy had many side effects which left my sister feeling extremely unwell. It also affected her walking and due to the cortisone treatments it caused her to retain a lot of water and she got really big. This period of time was very difficult for Lynda and my parents. Unfortunately, people can be very insensitive. Lynda was often stared at because she was large and had lost her hair due to treatment.

Despite this the radiation seemed to work, and for the next year or so things seemed to be fairly smooth. However, my sister then started experiencing a lot of complications and ended up in the hospital for many weeks. During this time she had another operation to insert shunts that would release the pressure on her brain.

After she was released, she went back home and life carried on as normal for a few months, or as normal as it could be in that situation. Looking back now, it must have taken an immense toll on my parents, but my



brother and I never really saw it, as they both always put on a brave face for us.

Around two years after finding out she had cancer, Lynda began sleeping more and more. Then one day she began to have seizures. An ambulance was called and she was rushed to hospital. At the time her doctor was away on holiday, and the only other neurosurgeon in Pietermaritzburg was covering his patients. The new doctor did some tests and spoke to my parents and asked them what her doctor had told them. They said her doctor told them, considering what she had been through, she was doing okay.

The new doctor looked at my parents and said he was very sorry, but the brain tumour had grown substantially. There was nothing he could do. She was dying and would not leave the hospital alive. He didn't know how long she had, but he was certain she would die.

Nothing can prepare you for that. I suppose you just go numb. You never really think about death, or at least I didn't at the time. It can just sneak up on you.

We spent the next two days by her side 24-7 and some of our family members from around the country started to come to say goodbye. Through all of this, I don't remember my sister Lynda ever being angry, cursing God or losing faith in Him. If anything, I remember her still praying and asking Jesus to look after and protect her, as well as us.

On the second day, my brother and I had just returned home to get some rest. My Dad arrived shortly afterwards crying. He told us my sister had just passed away in my mother's arms.

We all hugged in disbelief. He then took us to the hospital so we could see Lynda and say goodbye. We lived literally across the road from the hospital, and 10 minutes later we were in her room.

I remember walking into the room and seeing my Mom still holding her. Lynda's body was there, but she had left. My Mom put her down, and we all sat in the room and cried. I remember a nurse came in to prepare the body to take to the mortuary. My Mom was furious and told her we hadn't even said goodbye yet.

The next few days were a bit of a blur, and about a week later we had the funeral. At that time, I didn't believe in Jesus or that a good God could ever let something like this happen. We had even taken Lynda to a healing meeting at a church, and they had anointed her with oil, prayed for her, and she still died. I was angry towards God.

At Lynda's funeral there were so many people that there wasn't enough room in the church. The only thing I remember clearly of that day was that we sang the hymn "The Lord is my Shepherd." To this day when I hear this song, I think of Lynda.

The next few months and years were very difficult on our whole family, especially on my parents. I think we

were all disillusioned with life and didn't really know what to do or where to turn. My parents decided they could not live in Pietermaritzburg anymore as it brought back too many memories of Lynda. They decided we would move to Hillcrest, just outside Durban.

Losing their daughter was very difficult for my parents and only now being a parent myself can I begin to imagine what it must have been like for them. In the next few years that followed, we all just moved on, or tried to.

I really enjoyed school, excelled in swimming and spent most of my spare time in swimming training. I remember having a few Christian friends at school, but to be honest they really irritated me because I did not believe in this God they were telling me about. After all, why did He kill my sister and destroy my family?

My first year out of school, I worked for a transport company based in Durban. My role was to drive down to the port and make sure the company's trucks had the right documentation and were loaded correctly so they could be released from the port.

A few months into the job, I was driving in the car, and my vision disappeared. I couldn't see. I felt extremely dizzy and my vision began to blur in and out. I managed to pull over on the side of the road. By this time, I was getting really scared, and I thought perhaps I had been drugged. I had one of those original mobile phones that had a speed dial on it. I called the office and told them

what was happening. They weren't sure what to do, but they called my brother and got him to come and pick me up.

My brother came and took me straight to the doctor. He examined me and said I needed to go to the hospital for observation. At the hospital they did some tests. At this stage I could now see again, but was still very dizzy.

The tests came back and showed nothing wrong. The doctors said I needed to go for a CAT (CT) scan to see what was going on in my brain. Fear gripped me. I was nineteen years old, and I wasn't ready to die. Did I also have a brain tumour like my sister?

They took me up to have the CAT scan and when I got there, one of the Christian girls I went to school with was working there, and she said she would pray that God would protect me.

The scan came back clear. I had never been so relieved in all my life! I was released from hospital a day or two later but still with constant dizziness.

The doctor said that there obviously was something wrong, but I would have to wait it out. That didn't help my nerves, because I thought at that moment I was going to die of some unknown disease. A few days later I went back to my General Practitioner (GP), and he said he would check my ears again. The hospital staff had done this a few times already and said my ears were fine. The GP looked in my ears and said he would like to flush my ears out as they looked dirty. While he was flushing my right ear, all of a sudden I heard a pop and

something dropped out of my ear. Instantly the dizziness stopped, and I felt normal again. The doctor then discovered that the thing that had popped out was a piece of a silicone earplug I had used for swimming training. It had obviously broken off and lodged itself onto my ear drum.

That evening I received a call from a friend's mother, who always told me about Jesus. She said to me, "Byron, how's your ear doing?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. I had not told anyone about what had happened at the doctor's office.

She said, "I have been praying and God told me that there was something stuck in your ear and when it comes out you will be fine."

Wow, she really got my attention! How could she know this? Had God really spoken to her?

I began to get interested in this Jesus and decided to put my feelings about my sister aside for a while and go and see if there was anything to this "God thing." I called a Christian friend, Dom, and asked if I could go to church with him. I still remember asking what I should wear. He said, "Byron, our church is very relaxed. You can just wear underwear if you like." I was pretty nervous to say the least, and wondered if he was actually joking about the underwear.

When we arrived at church, it was weird and not what I thought it would be at all. Everyone seemed like they were really happy. "This is obviously one of those happy-clappy churches," I thought. "That's not for me."

But there was a strange peace there, and I was uncomfortably comfortable. I went back a few times and finally surrendered my life to Jesus after an altar call.

A new peace and joy began to flood my life. God had begun to reveal Himself to me, and I had an encounter with the Living God. God was no longer this guy who was mad at us and who sat in Heaven; He was this guy who was with me, right where I was, broken and all. God slowly began to restore me and more and more, I began walking in wholeness.

I have asked God many times about what happened with Lynda. I believe He has spoken to me and given me peace that it wasn't His perfect plan, but there are some things in life we are just not going to understand. I have all eternity with Lynda and plenty of time to chat with her and God about what happened. My role here on earth is to move on and allow God to remove all the hurt and live victoriously as a victor and not a victim.

No one in life has it easy and it's easy to think that we are the only person to go through hardships and that no one else understands. The truth is everyone has issues and troubles. We need to see the light at the end of the tunnel and see that some things will be left for eternity.

I encourage you if you have been through a loss, to look to Jesus and decide to let Him be Lord. Instead of spending your whole life asking why, make a decision to walk forward in victory and leave some chatting to Jesus for eternity. You can move forward whole and complete in Him.

I can honestly say that God has removed the hurt and sorrow in me from my sister passing away. I will never forget her, nor will I forget what happened, but I will not allow it to define the rest of my life. God is good all the time, even when I don't understand. I suppose for me, I've realised that everyone dies, and it's eternity that is important. Philippians 4:7 NIV says "The peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." There is peace available in the midst of not understanding.

It won't be all that long and I will be reunited with Lynda again. So I look forward to that day, but until then, I want to live every day full of hope, full of joy, knowing the future is bright because Jesus has my future. He has my life, it's in His hands, and He knew me before I was formed in my mother's womb (see Psalm 139:13). He knows how to restore me.

It's so interesting that we sang the hymn "The Lord is my Shepherd" at Lynda's funeral as it's from Psalm 23 (NIV), which reads:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.

I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death. God has restored my soul and He has given me a place of peace. I am seated at His table, and my life is full. I am a blessed man! I have a wonderful family - all of whom now believe in God, a beautiful wife, a beautiful little daughter and a new born son. God is so good; He has restored my life. If He has done it for me, He can do it for you.

I encourage you to let Jesus in to your whole life, even into those places you don't want Him, those places in your life that have caused you to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Stop camping in the valley. Come out instead, and sit at the table God has prepared for you. It's a good table, a feast set up just for you in the presence of your enemies. Don't allow hurt and fear to hold you back anymore. Jesus wants to give you rest and peace and joy that overflows. You can dwell in His house for evermore.





**1982 - 1992**  
*Lynda van der Merwe*



## 2

### The Tammie Factor

**L**ike any guy, I have always found women interesting. While I was at school and for the first few years out of school, I dated lots and lots of girls. I would never stay with any of them for a long length of time. I was more interested in the pursuit than settling down. As soon as a girl was interested in a long-term commitment, I would lose interest and end the relationship

Without knowing it, I had a real problem with commitment. At the time, I just thought that was normal. But later on, God revealed to me that I had an issue with a woman loving me, as I had a deep seated fear that she would abandon me, leave me or die, like my sister had. Once I became aware of this, I asked God to remove the lie. Within a short space of time, I felt healed and was ready to settle down.

A few months later I met a girl and within a few weeks, fell head over heels in love with her. She was perfect, she was beautiful, she loved Jesus, and we really got on well. I was convinced that this would be my wife and felt God confirm this for me.

A month or two into the relationship, I went on a mission trip to Mozambique. The trip had been organized by various churches, and there were many

different churches represented on the trip. One day towards the end of the trip, one of the men from another church said he had a word from the Lord for me. He said, "The woman you are with now is not your wife." I thanked him for his word and walked away. I felt sure he had heard wrong; there was no possible way. Hadn't God already spoken to me?

When we returned from Mozambique, the girl ended the relationship with me. I was absolutely devastated, and I could not believe what had happened. I was angry with God and felt that He had absolutely let me down. How could this be? I thought she was to be my wife. In my mind, anyway.

Surely God was not a loving father. What kind of a father removes the hurt from my sister dying only to put me into the position of someone I loved leaving me?

I was heartbroken. Soon afterwards I heard a message at church of laying down your life for Jesus and trusting Him, that He had the perfect spouse for you. The preacher said we can trust God; He knows better than us, and He is in control and knows what He is doing. I listened to that sermon over and over for weeks as I was a broken man.

Finally after a few weeks I decided to go to England for a month or so to take my mind off things. All that I kept thinking was that God didn't love me, He was not good and He didn't care about me.

While in England I went to visit a good friend, who had been instrumental in my salvation and getting to know

Jesus. He was a great person and it was the first time that I had met his wife.

The next Sunday morning when I woke up, I had said to the Lord that I was walking away from my faith that day, as I simply couldn't believe a good Father would do this to a son He was supposed to love. I had been radically saved and never for a moment thought of not serving the Lord. This morning, however, I was serious. Enough was enough, I was hurt, and God didn't seem to care.

I hadn't told my friends what was going on in me. Once we had eaten breakfast, they said I needed to come to church with them. I agreed, but in my heart had said, "Lord this is the last church service I'm ever going to."

As we arrived at the church, I started crying. We hadn't even sat down, and I was in tears. From the time I got there until the time I left, I cried. I have absolutely no idea what the service was about, what we sang or what was preached but God had met with me.

During the meeting I felt God say, "You have two choices today and they both involve death. The one option is to walk away and you will die. You have seen too much and the devil will kill you. The other option is to die to yourself and surrender to Me and trust Me."

I didn't want to go back to my old life, but surrendering everything to Jesus just seemed so overwhelming. How could I know He was good? He was asking me to trust Him with no strings attached, even if it meant that I

would never marry. I would have to trust Him. So I surrendered. I knew that was the only option.

After I returned home from England, I was on an entrepreneurial TV show. Following that, I felt my ministry was to be on TV. So I decided to move up to Johannesburg and complete a television presenting course and pursue my TV career. It turns out moving had nothing to do with TV, but it had everything to do with my future.

A few weeks before I appeared on the TV program, I was at the evening service of my church in Durban. There was a girl who was sitting on her own and seemed to not know anyone. I asked a friend to ask her to come and sit with us, as she looked lonely. The girl's name was Tammie.

After the meeting, a group of people had agreed to meet at the local restaurant for a dessert and drink. I invited Tammie along. She said she would come and she followed me in her car to the restaurant. She lived in Johannesburg, around 300 miles from Durban. She was down for the weekend visiting her sick grandmother.

Once we got to the restaurant we sat down and waited for the others to arrive. But, no one else turned up and we ended up chatting until around midnight, only to be interrupted by Tammie's younger sister, in her pyjamas. She had driven through the town looking for Tammie's car, as Tammie had said she was going to church at 5pm and it was now midnight.

Tammie then left with her sister but not without giving me her phone number, as I had told her I was moving to Johannesburg in a few weeks, and she had said she would introduce me to some people.

She had clearly expressed that she wasn't interested in a relationship as she had a boyfriend at the time. I was fine with that as I wasn't looking either.

At that time I was really questioning God's love for me and as she left I said to God, "Lord, how much do you love me? Do you love me so much that you would send a girl all the way from Johannesburg to be my wife?" It was such a random comment and I thought there was no way God would love me that much.

In the next few weeks, I moved up to Johannesburg and after a little while began to get lonely as I knew no one. I was sitting in a restaurant drinking a milkshake alone and feeling sorry for myself, when Tammie called and asked if I wanted to get together for a cup of coffee with her. As it turned out she was in a coffee shop just down the road. So, I walked straight over.

She told me she had broken up with her boyfriend and she just couldn't resist my charm. (Tammie tells me that my recollection of the day's events is slightly different to hers). But nonetheless we started dating from that day. I knew she was the girl for me, when on our first dinner date I asked if she minded if I could let out some wind. She looked at me strangely and said "I suppose so." I let one go and we both had a great laugh.

Two years later we were married and lived in Durban together.

On our wedding day in 2005, as Tammie walked down the aisle, I saw her and how beautiful she looked. As she walked towards me, God reminded me of when I had asked Him how much He loved me, and if He loved me so much that He would send a girl all the way from Johannesburg to be my wife. Well, He loved me more than I could even imagine.

God is so good; His love for us shows no end. Looking back, the best decision I have ever made in my life was dying to myself and trusting God on that day in that little church in England.

I believe one of the greatest testimonies of God's love for and towards us is the spouse that He has prepared for us. They are the very expression of His love. I urge you to honour, cherish and adore the spouse God has given you.

Tammie is the perfect partner in life for me and she takes my faith in Jesus to a whole new level. There is no one on Earth with whom I would rather see the plan of God fulfilled in our lives. She is a loving, kind and mighty woman of God. I know without doubt that I would not have been able to face half the things that I have faced in my life without this wonderful woman at my side. She brings peace, calm and stability to every situation.

I want to end this chapter by imploring those who have not yet found the person God has set aside for them. Trust God as He is faithful. Surrender all to Him; He is good and will come through for you. If He did it for me, He can do it for you.



# 3

## On a New Mission

**I**n the beginning of 2008, Tammie and I both felt that God was changing seasons in our lives. I was previously involved in house building, but the property market had suffered heavily and building was no longer a feasible financial option for me. I was seeking God for the next opportunity that He had for us.

In early February 2008, I was thinking about going to China on a business trip to buy electricity generators and import them into South Africa. South Africa had been going through an energy crisis and electricity was being cut to homes on a daily basis.

At the time, our friend Renée was staying with us from England and we asked her to pray and tell us what she felt God was saying to us. Renée was an old friend and we trusted that she also heard God clearly. We had not told her our plans as we wanted God to confirm what we thought He had told us.

After praying she said that she didn't hear God say anything specific. Without the confirmation we were not going to move forward. I have found it's helpful with life's big decisions to get confirmation from the Lord through people you trust. We are all still learning how to hear the Lord clearly. I don't believe it's wise to change our lives on a word we think we have heard from

God without a lot of confirmations from other people, those whom we trust also hear God clearly.

Having still no idea what I was supposed to do, I began seeking God more intensely. The Bible says “seek and you will find” (see Matthew 7:7), so I began to expect to find what the Lord had for us. A few weeks later I was praying in my lounge, and God spoke to my heart that we were to move to England. It was so left field that I was dumbstruck. I had no desire to move to England; I was probably one of the most passionate South African people around. I loved South Africa and always thought our future would be there.

I waited for Tammie to get home, and we discussed it. All I could envision in my mind was going for six months, taking some time away from what we had been used to. I thought during the time away God would show me a product we needed in South Africa that I could bring back, and we would be home in a few months.

Tammie, however, was not as keen as I was to go for a short period of time. She did not want to pack up our lives for just six months. After all, we had two beautiful dogs and a wonderful home which God had blessed us with. Tammie said the minimum period she would be prepared to leave for was a year. I reluctantly agreed, and I said I would submit it to the eldership at our local church first. We were not going without their blessing. I met with one of the elders and he said he felt it was God's plan for us. Nevertheless, he would take it to the other elders, and they would pray about it. About a

week later, the eldership came back to me and said they thought it was God, and we should go to England.

Tammie had a British passport, and we had been married for three years, so I applied for a spousal visa. We had a friend who had recently applied for one, so they guided us through the paperwork. We submitted the application, along with the £800 fee, and we waited.

Within twenty four hours I received a text from the British consulate in Pretoria, stating that my visa application had been processed. How good God was, I thought. We must have heard him right, and it only took twenty four hours to get a visa.

The next day I went to the visa agency in Durban to collect my passport. I opened the envelope and excitedly looked for my visa in my passport. There was nothing there, no British visa, just a consulate stamp!

I then looked at the letter attached and it read along the lines of, "We are sorry but your visa has been denied." Very little further information was given other than, "You have the right to appeal within twenty eight days but don't contact us as it may jeopardize your application." I was in shock! How could that be? I was sure we had heard God. I was bitterly disappointed.

The denial of my spousal visa had me stumped. I chatted with Tammie, and we decided we needed to appeal the decision. Two of the things they had said on the letter were that they were not happy with our finances and our accommodation once we arrived in the

UK. I wasn't really sure what that meant. I phoned all the visa companies I could find in South Africa, and they all said that they did not deal with appeals. Eventually, one of the companies said the only thing they could think of was for me to contact an immigration lawyer in London and ask their advice.

I called a company in London, and they said that the appeals procedure could be quite difficult. However they could do it, but it would require £2000 before they would look into it any further. The other option would be for Tammie to move to the UK without me, and once established, she could apply for my visa, as it would be more likely to be approved. Both those options were not okay with us. We didn't want to spend that kind of money on a maybe, and we were not interested in being apart for several months. There had to be another way.

We fervently sought God but had no breakthrough. Tammie had already resigned from her job and we needed a solution. During that time our church had a leader's weekend away with a guest speaker, who was another pastor in Durban. In the middle of one of his messages he stopped and said, "Where God has called you, no one can stop you." It was just a statement spoken to everyone, but Tammie and I knew it was God speaking to us.

Once we got home it had already been about two weeks, and we still had no idea how to appeal the denial. Finally, I was on my knees praying and suddenly I thought I should contact the British trade department, tell them my story and ask them to give me the phone

number of someone at the visa department who could help me. I knew the visa department had to have a phone number and there must be someone who could help us. So, I called the British trade department. I got through to a lady and explained my story to her. She said, "It is very strange that you called because I worked in the visa department for seven years and have recently moved to trade." She said luckily that day the people who worked in her department were off sick, as normally she would not be able to discuss anything like that with me. She then asked me to read to her what the denial letter said. I did so, and she promptly said I needed to get a pen. Just like that she told me, in detail, everything that I would need to get my appeal in and my application approved. God is so good!

Admittedly, it was a lot of documentation, but we knew what to do. Within a week we had everything we needed and were ready to file the appeal. We would need to drive to Pretoria to submit the application. So, we decided to drive up as soon as we could. It turns out the day we drove up was actually our wedding anniversary, but we both had been so distracted. We only realized this when we stopped for lunch on the way to Johannesburg.

The plan was to stay with Tammie's mother in Johannesburg, submit our application and wait at her house for a few days until the application was approved so we wouldn't have to drive back up to Pretoria again to collect the passports. The trip is around 400 miles from Durban to Pretoria and Johannesburg is near Pretoria.

We had one day to hand in our application and then it was Easter weekend. The Tuesday after Easter weekend would be day 28, the final day we could appeal. So, we wanted to get it in before the weekend. We were about to leave for the consulate from Johannesburg when Tammie's sister said, "Perhaps, we should give the consulate a call. Their website says they are closed." We called, and it turned out they were closed. I was now really nervous. There was no room for error; we could only hand it in on the last day we had to appeal it. I've found that often, God cuts things fine. Walking by faith can be very interesting at times.

Tuesday came, and we submitted the visa. The lady had to come around the glass cubicle, as our mound of paperwork could not fit through the slot in the glass. She took our whole lives in her hands along with the original paperwork for everything we owned, including the title deed to our house and cars. She then gave us a little letter in return, which basically said, "Don't call us. We will call you and your appeal may take 6 months to process."

Six months? We couldn't wait that long. Our lives were on hold, and now neither of us was working.

We waited around in faith for two weeks in Johannesburg with no response. Finally we reluctantly decided to drive back to Durban as we needed to get back home to our dogs. All the way from Johannesburg to Durban, we were praying that God would intervene and that the consulate would call us. We would then

turn around and go back and collect our documents. The call never came, and we were both very despondent.

The next day we decided to go and visit friends of ours, Shaun and Paula, who were our breakthrough couple. Every time we spent time with them, God would break through in some area of our lives.

As we turned off their street and into their driveway, my phone rang. It was the British consulate. The lady on the other end of the line said they had reviewed my appeal and that my visa had been granted. She went on to say that she would call me the next day to confirm when I could pick it up. Breakthrough! God is so good! Three days later she called, and we arranged for a friend to pick up the documents and ten days later we moved to England.

Upon arriving in England, we once again saw the favour of the Lord. I had received a prophetic word from a trusted friend before leaving South Africa that God was taking me from the front line and returning me to the hospital tent for some rest and recovery. This word was specific to business in that I would experience a season of not working for myself.

Within a week of our arriving in England, I got a job doing home maintenance. I started the following Monday and stayed with the company a year until the Lord called me out. Tammie also got a job in the first week, working in the travel industry where she stayed until God called her out.

Six months have turned into eight years and counting.



## 4

# The God Who is Above a Recession

**I**n March 2009 a very prophetic friend of mine, Wade, sent me an email with a word he felt the Lord was saying to me. Wade is a trusted friend, and the prophetic words he had spoken over me in the past had come to pass. So, I always pay attention when he has something for me.

In the email, he said that he felt like there was a change of season coming in my life in the area of work, and I would start working for myself again in the very near future. At the time I was very happy with my job, and Tammie and I were enjoying my getting paid a regular salary. Our previous experiences of working for myself had been great, but as with any business, there were ups and downs. Being employed sometimes has advantages, and I was enjoying them.

Within a week or two, things at work began to change, and all of a sudden it seemed like God's grace for the job had lifted. It was pretty much the same work but just that I didn't enjoy it anymore. I began praying and asking God what I should be doing and in what industry.

Within a few weeks it became clear I should start my own home maintenance business. During this time God also spoke to me and said He was sending me back to

school, but He would pay me for it. That has turned out to be so true. As in the last six years I have been alone on different sites every day and have had the opportunity to listen to eight hours of preaching and teaching almost every day. This has been so valuable for my relationship with the Lord and my ability to hear His voice more clearly.

To be honest, I wasn't all that excited about starting a business. We were in the middle of one of the worst recessions to hit Britain in many years, and lots of people I knew were getting retrenched. Every week I was hearing of someone else I knew who was out of work. I had a job, granted I didn't like it that much anymore, but I had a job. Shouldn't I be grateful and just leave it at that? Surely this could not be God; He wouldn't make me do something like this. Wasn't God aware of the recession?

I began to pray into it some more. It became clear I would be in disobedience to the Lord if I did not step out and start my own business. I had saved up a bit of money, and Tammie and I had chatted about it. We knew if I stopped working, we would have around three to four months of savings while things got off the ground in the new business.

At the time, Tammie's salary could not support us. So, I needed to bring home income. I started doing some research on how to start this business and easily managed to find what I would need to do. God was so faithful and I began to keep a notebook next to my bed. I would wake up in the middle of the night with an idea

of how I was going to do it. The name for the business even came to me one night in a dream.

Everything began falling in line and God's favour was so evident. A friend designed the logos and the website, and while she was doing that, I bought a van. It turned out the colour of the van I had bought was identical in colour to the logo she had designed for the business. God is so clever! That meant I saved over £1000 in vehicle signage, as I didn't have to get the van shrink wrapped for the sign writing that I wanted to install. I had felt from the outset that I needed to do the business with excellence. Everything I did needed to be and look very professional.

The home maintenance industry is very competitive. At first, I had no idea how to penetrate the market. God had spoken to me to base the business on sowing seed. He told me to have flyers printed and to offer any new customers a half hour free labour. With any online advertising, I was supposed to do the same thing. Galatians 6:7 tells us, a man reaps what he sows. I began to sow work and would trust God to reap work.

A month or so later the business planning was ready, and I was ready to start. I had resigned from my previous job and fully expected my business to take off from the start. I was sure this was a God thing.

The first week passed by with no calls, no emails, and no responses to any advertising I did. I was becoming despondent. What had I done? Was God really in this? Or was I just a stupid guy giving up a job in a recession?

I began to seek God, and all I heard God say was, "Take the money you have saved up and give it to this person". God told me I was limiting Him because I refused to trust Him. He then gave me Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) which says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all of your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight." Wow, what a blow! Was God crazy? How could I do that? To my natural mind it made no sense, but I knew this was God. I had seen God do similar things in the past, and He had never let me down. I discussed it with Tammie, and she said we should pray about it some more and ask God for confirmation.

The following week at church one of the elders got up in the service and said that he felt God saying there was someone in the service who was limiting God because they refused to trust Him. He then read Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV). "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all of your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight." By this stage, I was in tears. I knew God was speaking to me and I needed to trust and obey Him.

Early the next week, I called the person to whom God had asked me to give my money and said I needed to come and see her. I put the money we had set aside in an envelope, and off I went to give it to her. God had also spoken to me in Proverbs 18:16 (NIV) which says, "A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great." God had said this gift from my business would open up a way for me and usher me into the presence of the great.

I gave the money and left. She called the next day to say thank you and to tell me how significant the amount had been to her. It was exactly the amount she needed to cover rent and some other bills. She had been trusting God for breakthrough and He had broken through for her.

I was so excited and knew I had heard God. Nevertheless, the week that followed was very disheartening. In all the previous times Tammie and I had stepped out in faith in finances, we had seen immediate provision. But this time nothing seemed to change. Every morning I put on my uniform and moved into the next room, as we had only a two-room flat, and reported for duty. I was now working for Jesus and wanted to be on time for work. The only problem was that Jesus didn't seem to have any other work for me other than spending time on my knees and worshipping Him.

I was getting desperate. It was now time to call my pastor, and arrange to meet. I arrived at his house, and we spent some time together over coffee. He said that I was changing an atmosphere and I shouldn't worry. God would come through for me. Just as I finished my visit, I received a call on my business line. This was my first call from a client, and they booked in a job. Granted it was just to change a tap washer. But, it was for a charity overseen by a member of the Royal Family.

I went in and changed the tap washer, left and thanked God for my first client. On the way home, I was worshipping the Lord, and as I sat down on my sofa at

home, I felt the Lord speak to me. He asked me who the highest authority in this nation was. The Royal Family, I replied. "Who did you work for today?" He asked.

"One of their charities" I replied. Just then the presence of God hit me like a ton of bricks. God had ushered me into the presence of the great. Immediately, I was secure in the fact that I was a son of the Most High God, and everything would be alright. The job had very little monetary value and they never called me again, but it had cemented something in me that God was in this and it would be okay.

Not much else changed. In fact, in the natural, physical world, it even got worse. My work van blew the engine and I needed to get it replaced. A new engine would be £1300, and I now had no money. I decided I couldn't borrow money for this but instead said to God, "You have a bill. I'm doing what you called me to do, and I'm not going to worry about this anymore." I got a great paying job, to which I caught the bus, and within a week I had the money and the van was fixed. Slowly work began to come in, and the business began to get better.

I remember the first bit of money I made. The Lord spoke to me about a friend who had been out of work for a long time. God said to take that money and sow it into his life and encourage him that God would break through for him. Money can be such a powerful thing when used as our expression of God's love towards someone else. I believe true love has actions with it. It was now easier to release money, and within a short space of time, God had replaced the money and more.

About a year into the business, things were going okay but not great. I began to seek God and ask Him what I should be doing to grow the business. One day while I was praying, I heard God say that I needed to give money on a monthly basis to a friend who was studying and doing what God had told her. [Doing so would enable her to do what she was called to do and not worry about provision]. The amount God spoke to me to give her was more than I was getting paid at the time.

I immediately said "Get behind me Satan!" as this surely could not be God. I chatted with Tammie, and as we were leaving for a family holiday in South Africa, she said we can pray about it while away. I was under a lot of pressure and thought I must have heard wrong because I was stressed.

We went to South Africa, and while I was there, I kept bringing this word to the Lord. Every time I brought it to him, I felt Him ask, "Why haven't you done it yet?" "Because it doesn't please me Lord," I replied. In my mind, the main reason was that I couldn't work out how it would be possible. I was already working hard and not prepared to work harder or longer hours. All I could see was my effort; I hadn't factored in God's grace.

By the time we returned from South Africa the matter was settled in our hearts. Nothing had physically changed, but in our hearts and minds we knew what God wanted us to do, and we were going to be obedient. Within the next week or so we had arranged to meet up with our friend and tell her the good news. We had dinner together and told her what the Lord was saying.

She was blown away but after saying thank you for the love we had showed her, she said she just simply could not accept it as it was just too much money. I said no problem and in the back of my mind thought, "Thank goodness! I'm off the hook! I've done what God has asked. She said no, but I've been obedient."

A month went by, and we still hadn't paid her as she had said no. Towards the end of the second month, while we were in a church meeting, I heard God say that we were supposed to give the two months money we would have given to our friend to a church in Zimbabwe. We were already helping this church with some of the rental income that was coming in through our house in South Africa. So, it wasn't such a strange word. God had said that the church was trusting Him for a church vehicle, and that we should take this money, plus all of the money we had saved up in South Africa from the rent of our property, and give it to them.

By now this sort of giving really excited me because this was money with a mission. We were now using what Jesus had put in our hands for the building of His kingdom.

In Revelation 21, (paraphrased) it speaks of Heaven and what it looks like. The streets are paved in gold, there are mansions, and its walls and gates are covered with precious jewels. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus prayed for Heaven's will to be on earth as it is in Heaven. So often we view finance, gold and silver here on Earth as treasure, but in Heaven they're the building blocks of



the kingdom. Gold is not treasure; it's pavement, and it's to be used for extending the kingdom.

It also says in Revelation 21:22 (paraphrased) that there is no temple in Heaven because the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. God is to be worshipped, not gold or money. That is what it should be like on Earth. I believe God has no problem with you having as much gold as you like here on Earth, but you had better use it to extend and build His kingdom. How foolish will we feel one day when we arrive in Heaven, and all we've ever done for God was build up a stock pile of Heaven's pavement. He doesn't want paving; He wants you to build new mansions for more people to come and live with Him in Heaven for eternity. Use your resources to get more people saved and into His kingdom. That is its purpose; that's money with a mission.

### Moving back to the story

I called the pastor in Zimbabwe and told him what we had heard the Lord say. We both were over the moon, and he was shouting and praising Jesus on the phone. Money can't buy the kind of joy we both experienced that day. He said the timing was just perfect as he was going to Durban in two weeks for a pastor's conference. While there, he would be able to collect the money and purchase a vehicle, as they had already done the research. They could get a vehicle straight from Japan that was shipped regularly into Durban, bound for other African countries. Buying a vehicle like that would mean very little import duty for them and they could get a whole lot more for their money. Isn't God amazing?

The following month, the friend who had been offered the money approached us and said she had been praying about it and was asking God to provide for her. God said He already had done so and that she needed to receive what He was giving her. So, they received it, and we gave it. Sometimes money is a weapon and God can use it to bring down strongholds.

The place where our friend was working and studying was closed to the gospel. It was really frowned upon to talk about God there. Our friend had shared the testimony about what was happening with one or two people, and before she knew it, people were seeking her out and asking about this God that was paying her while she studied. We thought it was about provision, which it was, but it was actually about the gospel reaching a place that had been closed. People don't want religion; they want a real Jesus, a Jesus who is tangible in a real way, and a Jesus who loves and cares for them.

Within the same period of time, Tammie had not been experiencing breakthrough financially at work. She was working long, hard hours but had been struggling to pick up her own clients. She worked in a company and spent most of her time working for other employee's clients, for which she didn't receive commission, as was company policy. We were both getting frustrated and began to ask God what we needed to do.

A few years before in South Africa, Tammie had started to get frustrated with what she earned and finally said to God that she was going to tithe what she wanted to

earn. Three months later her salary was up at the level she had tithed at. So, we knew God could break through in this current financial struggle she was facing.

About eighteen months after Tammie started working for this company in the UK, I was worshipping the Lord in my office/lounge when I heard Him say that I needed to call Tammie and tell her to transfer £200 to a friend today and in two months her salary would double. I felt the Lord say the timing was crucial and needed to be done today though. She was obedient to the word of the Lord and made the transfer. Within two days our friend phoned in tears. Earlier in the week, God had been challenging them to tithe and honour Him. By tithing they knew they would be £200 short for their bills. They had obeyed God and so had we; God had proven Himself so faithful.

I was really excited. If I had heard God correctly, I knew the rest of the word would come to pass. God is so good. As Tammie's salary was paid one month in arrears three months later her salary didn't double, it tripled. She had picked up a very lucrative client and was set to earn that kind of money every month. Praise God.

While this was all happening, we went to a church service where a guest speaker, had come to preach. He spoke on idols and said no matter how much you give, you always feel guilty that you haven't done enough. Tammie's employer was great but we knew that for her, work had become an idol and she needed to leave. We knew she had just come into a great salary. There was a temptation in our minds to just hang on a little longer,

and earn some more money, so she could leave in a comfortable position financially. That was not God's plan, and we both knew it. We knew she had to resign and the time to do this was now.

Within a few days she resigned. From a natural standpoint, it was absolutely foolish. She had stood it out for two years hardly making money, and now that she had finally got her big break, she was leaving. Needless to say, colleagues in her office were confused and wanted to know why. Tammie, who is very open about Jesus, said this is what God had spoken to us and that's why we were doing it. Tammie has always been such a testimony to Jesus. Her colleagues had already seen God come through for us with a bed for which we had trusted Him. (I will tell you this story in chapter 8.)

Tammie had told me a few months earlier that she thought God was saying she needed to come and help me with my work. I literally laughed and said, "Babe I'm giving financially to this other person. I hardly get paid enough, and you want to stop work as well?" Just thinking about it stressed me out. I thought I would have to work harder in order for us to survive without Tammie's salary. But, God's grace is enough. He can make all grace abound towards you so that in all things at all time you can have more than you need (see 2 Corinthians 9:8).

After Tammie resigned, she came to help me. A few months later, we felt the season for giving to the friend was up. God had already spoken to them, and we were released from it.

The business has been a great blessing to me but has not been without its own challenges and spiritual battles. During the first year of running the business, I made a mistake on a job and drilled out a supporting ring beam on a block of flats whilst installing an extractor fan. This ended up being a serious problem. The onslaught of evil thoughts was unlike anything I had ever experienced up to that time. I was having thoughts non-stop that I would go bankrupt, the building would collapse, people would die, and I would be in so much trouble. These thoughts made it seem like there was no way out.

It absolutely rocked me. It felt like someone had taken the ground from under me. Tammie had never seen me this rocked. We knew this had to be more than just a physical thing, we had entered into a spiritual battle. Tammie and I began to seek God furiously for the solution. Tammie told me she felt that this was a spiritual giant in our lives, and it was time to cut its head off just like David did to Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17:51).

It took three days and three nights of absolute turmoil mentally when finally I heard God say I needed to read Psalm 91 in the Amplified Bible. In verse 10 it says (paraphrased) that no calamity can come near my tent. What was calamity? I looked the word up in the dictionary and saw it. It is an extreme loss or sudden disaster.

For years, every time we gave into the Kingdom of God or committed to give into His Kingdom, things just

seemed to go wrong. Almost every time we gave, we would somehow lose the same amount of money we gave, in some form of unexpected disaster or expense. We eventually came to terms with it. Whatever we gave would normally cost us double.

When I read this definition, my heart went off like a rocket. I knew this spiritual giant had been in our lives for years, and it was now time to knock him down and cut off his head. I made a placard and stuck it up in our house. On it I wrote "Calamity; today (and wrote the date) we cut off your head in this house in Jesus' name. You and all your friends get out of this house forever in Jesus' name." Tammie and I prayed, took communion and stood in agreement that Jesus was our deliverer and he would provide a simple solution to the problem with the hole I had drilled, a solution we could afford to pay for, one we could just move on from and never hear anything about again.

It didn't feel like we had the victory, but we had it. We had taken it by faith. The very next day, money that had been outstanding for months was paid to us, and a solution for the hole was found. The ring beam was repaired in a week or so for a price we could afford. Since that day, we have been able to give finances freely into the kingdom of God with no repercussions.

God is so good.

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of a GOOD GOD**

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AN ORDINARY MAN  
WITH AN  
EXTRACORDINARY  
GOD

*"HE'S STILL THE  
GOD OF MIRACLES"*

**BYRON VAN DER MERWE**

## About the Author



Byron van der Merwe is married to Tammie. They have a daughter, Hannah and recently welcomed baby Joshua into the family. They live in Hampton, just outside of London, England. Both Byron and Tammie are very involved in a local church called Kingsgate Church in Kingston upon Thames, where they help oversee the prophetic ministry together with the Church's eldership team.

Byron is also a passionate speaker. If you would like him to come and share at your event please go to <http://www.livinginvictoryministries.com/christian-speaker/> for more details.