



The Incredible
Journey

Finding HOPE
when all seems



LOST



GARY KENT | CHARMAINE WIGGLESWORTH



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**Unless otherwise noted, all Bible texts are
from the Authorised King James Verison**

Published by The Incredible Journey
GPO Box 274 | Sydney | NSW 2001 | Australia

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FINDING HOPE WHEN ALL SEEMS LOST

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LIFE IS FRAGILE

Most of us have experienced this reality in one way or another, whether through a sudden accident, the death of a loved one, a life-threatening diagnosis, a break-down of trust in a relationship, or a devastating financial loss. The pillars that support a beautiful world can quickly crumble to the ground, leaving you sitting in dust and ashes.

Let us consider the lives of real people who have experienced deep struggles and pain in their lives, yet somehow—out of the dust of brokenness—have found a way to cling onto hope when all seems lost. Perhaps your pain is so great, you doubt you could ever find hope again. Don't give up. A ray of sunshine is waiting to shine on you.

BROKEN DREAMS

“I want out—our marriage is over.” The words stung me like bitter winds in a snow storm. He was the man I married; I expected to grow old with him. He was my one true love. We were the perfect match, the ideal couple—or so everyone thought. We had been married in a beautiful old stone church, and had shared our deepest hopes and dreams. We had wanted to work together to make a difference in the world, to help people in underprivileged countries experience a better way of life. So we had packed our bags and left Australia to begin a crazy, exciting adventure into the unknown. I didn’t mind where we went, as long as I was with him. We pioneered many humanitarian endeavours together, always feeling that the sacrifice of comforts and

home was worth it because of the smiles we saw on the faces of the people we were helping.

But much to my heartache, over time I felt my husband's love withdrawing from me. He travelled a lot with his work, and even more towards the end, so that at times we saw each other only five days in a month. I saw signs of an emotional attachment forming with another staff member. I shared my fears with others in whom I felt I could confide, and they were shocked that I could even think such a thing of my husband. However, it was hard not to notice the warmth in his manner whenever he interacted with her, their daily lunches together and evenings he spent at the office with "pressing deadlines". When I visited his office, I'd sometimes check the bedroom for any tell-tale signs. Then

he organised for her to travel with him on one of his trips, so he could “show her the ropes”. I was devastated. I threw myself into my work in an attempt to numb the pain. Finally, he told me it was over. That day, my life changed forever. I fought hard to find a way forward, but nothing changed.

It was a surreal situation. I would find myself sitting at my desk, completely overwhelmed with intense pain, facing the “D” word. The reality was more personal: I was losing the only man I had ever loved. Not only that, but our close-knit family unit, our future together, our reputation as a couple and family, and much, much more was at stake. So much devastating loss. My heart was broken. I felt like a piece of garbage thrown on the rubbish heap. This was complete and utter rejection.

We made plans to separate and I entered a long black tunnel, which I knew only God could get me through. I returned home to Australia. The joy had been taken out of my life and I could no longer laugh. I was merely existing, hanging on for grim death to a God who I knew loved me, in spite of what others thought of me. When I was feeling desperate and alone, I found comfort in these Bible texts: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1); and “You are precious and honoured in my sight...because I love you” (Isaiah 43:4).

This journey has helped me discover that God knows me, and that He is faithful. He understands. He sees everything I have been through. The situation I found myself in was not God’s fault; it was the result of selfish choices. Jesus also experienced

rejection by those closest to Him. I chose to believe that, in spite of the mess my life was in, God still had plans for me. “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

Through holding onto God’s promises, the love of my children, and a wonderful divorce recovery program run by a local church, I eventually emerged from the other end of the black tunnel. Jeremiah 29:11 has certainly proven true! Five years after my divorce, God brought the most wonderful man into my life. Since our marriage, we have both been so very happy! He loves and adores me for who I am, and I also love him dearly. I finally feel that I can relax and be myself; I feel safe in my husband’s love.

Forgiveness of my former spouse was an issue I knew I needed to address. I had listened to people speak on this topic. For me, it turned out to be an intellectual choice I had to make. I didn't feel like it in my heart, but I knew it was the only way to experience true peace and freedom. In prayer, I said to God, "I choose to forgive, but You will have to make the change in my heart." Incredibly, God gave me His gift of forgiveness, not only for my ex, but also for the woman who had stolen his heart from me. I can now associate with them, and treat them both with love and respect, and even hug the woman who betrayed me. God has truly worked His miracle of grace in my heart. I don't know where I would be today if God was not with me. He has been my strength, my guide, and my wisdom, and has brought healing, hope and joy into my life.

A BATTLE WITH CANCER

Life was exciting! My wife and I and our two young children were about to move to country New South Wales, Australia, to begin the career I had always dreamed of: working on the land as a beekeeper. Things were wrapping up at work. I had picked up my bee truck, signed up for a rental property, and was heading back to Victoria to begin the big move, when the phone rang.

“Hello, is this Ben?”

“Yes, it is.”

“This is Dr Leng. Would you please

come into the surgery as soon as possible to discuss test results from your recent biopsy?”

My mind raced back to the day a doctor had performed a procedure on my back to remove a small black freckle, which turned out to be a melanoma, 1.1mm deep. It had seemed so small and harmless, and, with the busyness of life, I hadn't thought much more about it. The doctor had warned me to be careful, as there was a risk that melanoma can return within five years. Five years later to the month, I found an egg-sized lump in my armpit. I had it checked by the doctor, who, with a worried look on his face, had taken a biopsy, and sent it off to the lab for tests. Now, it had come to this.

“Dr Leng, I am travelling interstate. Can

you please tell me the results over the phone?" I begged.

The doctor clearly preferred to tell me in person, but eventually the awful truth came out. "Ben, the test results reveal that lump under your arm is melanoma."

My heart sank. I didn't have time to be sick, let alone a victim of cancer. I had a beautiful wife and two young children. And what would become of my new career? Our move back to my home state?

I managed to thank the doctor, and continued the trip home in a daze. Numerous medical appointments followed. It was discovered that I had a very aggressive form of melanoma that spreads rapidly, so we had to act quickly. I was referred to a cancer specialist, who confirmed that I had stage

3 melanoma. I had surgery to remove the invasive lump. But the specialist told me the melanoma would definitely return if I didn't have more treatment, and it needed to be fast and effective. He then mentioned a cancer clinic in Melbourne that treated people with trial drugs, based on cutting edge research. That sounded like the best hope I had for life, so I signed up, and began immunotherapy. My body experienced horrible side effects from the drugs: I was so freezing cold, I felt like I was at the North Pole. With my liver failing, I ended up in ICU. I lost 20kg in 6 weeks, and was reduced to skin and bone.

Six weeks later, there came an even bigger blow. I was extremely sick, and was even coughing up blood, so I had more tests and scans, which revealed that the melanoma had spread all through my body (see Figure

1). The pain increased to unbearable levels. Blood tests revealed 16,500 active cancer DNA in 1 mL of blood. I found out that many people die with a blood count around 2,000 to 3,000! I had progressed to melanoma stage 4C. It was only one week until Christmas, and it was clear that this would be the last Christmas that I would be with my family on this earth. I would never live to see my children grow up. I dreaded leaving my wife to face it all alone.

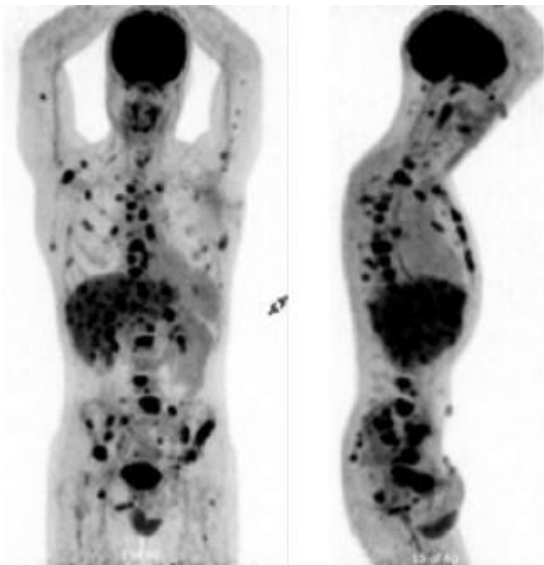


Figure 1. Ben's scan December 2016

My world prayed for me – my family, my

friends, my church. They prayed for the research scientists who were working on my case, that they would be given special wisdom and guidance, and that God would perform a miracle, if it was in His will and plan. Three weeks later, blood test results showed a cancer DNA level of 0! The scans confirmed the miracle, as evident in the photo in Figure 2. Many of my tumours were now completely gone!

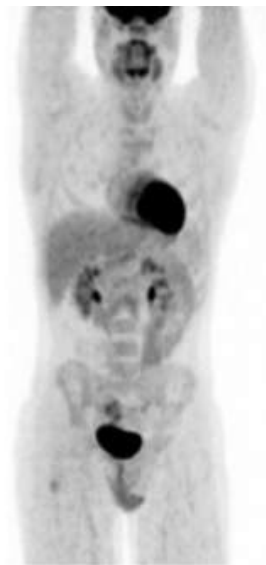


Figure 2. Ben's Scan October 2017

We thanked God for this amazing

encouragement! But the battle was not yet over. Subsequent immunotherapy treatment led to side effects of massive colitis and thyroid malfunction. Five months later, I lost motor-skills in my left leg. Further investigation revealed that I now had twelve active brain tumors, one of them 20mm in diameter. I was given days, even hours, to live. We decided to tell the kids that it was possible that Daddy was going to die. My kids drew me beautiful pictures, and hugged me tight, asking, “Daddy, you are going to get better, aren’t you?”

My world prayed for me again. In my distress, I cried out to God, who had been my source of comfort and strength through this entire roller-coaster ride. During the night that I thought might be my last night on earth, I opened my Bible and read small

portions of the Psalms, which gave me great comfort. One passage in particular spoke to me and I held tightly to it:

What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be Thou my helper. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness...O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever (Psalm 30:9-12).

An amazing peace came over me, and I drifted off to sleep.

God again saw fit to work a miracle, and I lived to see another day. In fact, more than a year has passed since then, and I treasure every new day of life God gives to me! I

saw my daughter's first day of school. I had another birthday. I even saw another Christmas! That milestone, the following Christmas, was so overwhelming, that we just sat together on the couch and hugged and cried—because I am here!! I am living on borrowed time: every special moment and every memory made with the people I love are gifts that I value with all my heart.

Have there been times of discouragement and despair? Absolutely! Being diagnosed with a terminal illness can drive anyone to moments of despair, let alone a person of thirty with a young family to care for. My family hate seeing me suffer like this. But instead of focusing on my pain and discouragement, I choose to be thankful. I am thankful for every little blessing, because without God's help, I wouldn't be here at all. I see little hugs from God

all along the way. Thankfulness to God overpowers any despair.

I have seen God provide in the most amazing ways, and supply our every need. Financial devastation often accompanies illness such as this, but right down to the smallest details, God has provided for us. Through the cancer clinic, He has provided the extremely expensive medications I need at a fraction of the cost. Many times, I feel like he is carrying me and cushioning me in his arms of love and care.

The cancer clinic call me their “miracle man”! I share my blessings with other cancer patients, and point them to Jesus. I was given the opportunity to share my story at the clinic’s AGM in front of their research doctors and was able to testify

to the power of prayer. My story made national news, because it's very rare for someone with metastatic melanoma as advanced as mine to survive at all.

Whether my battle ends now, or many years in the future, I will still keep on trusting Jesus. Knowing that God is managing my case makes the pain more bearable. I can still praise Him in this storm. I have hope, because there is a world beyond this one where there will be no cancer, no pain, and no suffering. Come soon, Lord Jesus!

WHEN YOUR WHOLE WORLD CRUMBLES

I sat on the back step of our farm house, huddled tightly in a ball. My heart was broken; I was in the depths of despair and grief. My world was black. Even though the sun was shining, I couldn't even feel or see its warmth. My precious baby, Sunny, was dead: miscarried before he was full term. It felt as if the whole world was a dark hungry beast, drawing me into its blackness. My heart cried out to God. Did He care? Did He see? Did He know how much I was hurting?

Then, out of the void, I felt a voice speak to me. It wasn't audible, but it spoke directly to my broken heart. A gentle feeling, a sudden knowledge: "I lost my Son, too." A warmth engulfed me in a giant hug. I felt the sun soaking deep into my skin. I became aware of the world around me. God knew how I felt. He understood and was there in that moment with me. He knew the emptiness and pain in my heart. This unexpected encounter with God filled me with peace, and healed much of my brokenness. But at the time I didn't realise that this experience would help me through a much tougher situation in the future.

Seven years later I sat with my husband on our kitchen floor holding the limp, broken and lifeless little body of our miracle boy. My blonde-haired, brown-eyed two-and-a-

half-year-old was the robust, healthy boy whom I had never expected to hold, given my history of miscarriage. Our bubbly, vivacious bundle of sunshine, he had provided endless laughs for our two older children. He was my healing “gift” from God, my husband’s shadow and right hand man. His precious little life had suddenly come to an end right here on our own land through a tragic farm accident.

Our world had yet again come crashing down around us. We were overwhelmed, lost, confused and shattered as we waited for the first responders to arrive. The stark emptiness and space around us was too enormous for us to be alone in. Psalm 23 filled my thoughts. I spoke it aloud. With broken voices, choking on our tears, my husband and I repeated the passage over and over. Though we were walking

“through the valley of the shadow of death”, we sensed God’s presence with us (Psalm 23:4). As we spoke those familiar words, He filled the emptiness of the room. We knew we were not alone.

The pain of that day is deep and heavy. It has stayed with me, ebbing to a memory and then washing back over me like fierce ocean waves. At times I have felt overwhelmed and crushed by it, that the weight of life is too heavy for me to bear. But never once have I doubted whether God is with me. A close family friend asked me why I wasn’t angry with God. My experience of losing Sunny brought God so close to me that I knew instantly He was hurting alongside me. He understood my pain. This isn’t the way he wanted my life to be. Mavi’s death wasn’t in His plan. I used to think that God was like

some kind of superhero that came flying in to save the day, so we never had to feel pain and suffering. But now I know that this idea of God is naïve and fanciful. I now understand that God never promised a life without pain on this earth. Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33, HCSB). Jesus promises us peace through the pain.

Through this heartache, I have experienced God’s love in a way I never thought possible. Conversation with God in prayer is how I survive each day. I seek counselling and help when I need them, but no one can be with me every hour of every day as God is. So I talk with Him, write Him letters, or journal my thoughts

about Him. I cry to Him when it hurts. I yell in pain and anger when I am frustrated; I tell Him when I think life is unfair and I feel hurt. I look for His little blessings scattered throughout my day, and I feel loved.

Some days the pain and anxiety have been so crippling that I haven't been able to function. Friends have prayed for me, God's beautiful peace has again filled my soul, and I have been able to get up and go on. When I am struggling, I read promises from the Bible. Knowing who God is, having a relationship with Him through prayer, claiming Bible promises, and having a faith community around me is what gives me strength.

I also have the wonderful hope that I will see Mavi again. My family and I love

to read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which describes that awesome day when Jesus' voice will awaken those who are sleeping in death, and together we will be taken up to Heaven to be with Jesus forever! It will be the first time we will be a complete family: all of us together with Sunny and Mavi, living in a perfect world!

FINDING HOPE WHEN ALL SEEMS LOST

These stories of hope and courage in the face of trial and tragedy are truly inspirational. It may be, however, that you feel so low you can't see how you could ever find peace through your pain.

In 1 Kings 19, the Bible tells the story of Elijah at a time when he was deeply discouraged. He had seen God do amazing things in the past (1 Kings 18), but became frightened when he received a personal threat from the infuriated Queen Jezebel. Elijah escaped to the wilderness where, in despair, he prayed that he might die (1 Kings 19:4).

Maybe you have seen God working in the lives of others—perhaps even in your own life—in the past. Maybe you want to believe He is powerful, and that He cares, but right now your trials and heartache are so big, so overwhelming, that you, like Elijah, are hiding in complete and utter discouragement.

Elijah went as far as Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai, searching for answers. He struggled with the idea that God had allowed pain in his life (1 Kings 19:10). Instead of answering Elijah directly, God asked him to stand on the mountain and experience a mighty wind, an earthquake and a fire (1 Kings 19:11-13). But the Bible says the Lord “was not in” those awesome events. Then God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice: a voice of calm and quietness that brought comfort,

healing and hope (1 Kings 19:12-13).

Sometimes the way God speaks is completely different from what we expect. God doesn't always work a miracle to remedy our situation, or give us the answer we are hoping for. God's solution is often a quiet peace placed in your heart; the strength to cope with a difficult situation; a still, small voice that comforts you and encourages you to claim God's promises, trust in His love and wait patiently for His timing.

As Elijah lay under a tree in the wilderness wishing to die, he truly believed that his best days were over. But God saw things differently. He had big plans for Elijah. God wanted him to encourage and lift up others through his journey. That is why it is important to share and connect with

others who are suffering pain: there is something healing about sharing our story.

Look beyond your darkness today, to the One who knows you and loves you. Jesus' promise is for you. He says, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). "For I am the Lord your God. I am holding your hand, so don't be afraid. I am here to help you" (Isaiah 41:13, CEV).

Jesus promised His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). In Revelation 21, the prophet John saw this beautiful place in vision. He encourages us with the words, "God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;

and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).

If your whole world has crumbled, and you are searching for hope when all seems lost, why not try reaching out to God? Tell him how you feel. Don’t be frightened to be honest. He has big shoulders. Seek out ways to know Him. Pray, study the Bible, look for the hope God has for your situation. Find a faith community to support you. Keep looking up for the ray of sunshine that God has prepared for you!

NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary-ruled notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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FOREVER!



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Most of us have experienced the fragility of life in one way or another, whether through an accident, illness or death, a breakdown of trust in a relationship, or a devastating financial loss. The pillars that support a beautiful world can quickly crumble to the ground, leaving you sitting in dust and ashes.

This booklet shares three inspirational journeys of hope and courage in the face of trial and tragedy. These experiences can help you to look beyond the darkness that surrounds you today, to find healing and peace in the arms of the One who knows and loves you.



Charmaine Wigglesworth has qualifications in Natural Health, and is a Director for the Nedley Depression & Anxiety Recovery Program. She facilitates a support group that provides friendship and emotional & spiritual support for women who want more out of their lives, in the suburbs of Brisbane, Australia.



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He has spoken and produced numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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