

# The university of life

*An extract from an article which I wrote on 16 November 2002 to encourage farmers who were suffering terribly at the height of the farm invasions. This was just shortly after I had bought a farm of my own by faith and had started farming.*

I had just attended a most moving year end graduation ceremony in November 2002. Several young teachers graduated after three years of hard work. The vision of Midlands Christian Training center, birthed about ten years previously after a remarkable prophetic directive, was to send well-trained Christian teachers out into the nation, to bring the light of Jesus into the lives of children. It was wonderful to see the passionate young men and women stand up on the stage, singing,

*“I hear your call, Lord, and I will run ... I’ll pay the price, Lord, no matter how great, I know You’ll go with me ...”*

and,

*“Lord when You ask, ‘Who will lead My children,’ my answer will be, ‘Here I am Lord, here I am, send me.’”*

Vision is wonderful, and there is nothing as moving as a whole group of people expressing a collective God-ordained vision. You feel like you just want to get in there and be a part of it.

**However ...**

On the next morning the group is not there anymore - the refrains of the song have died down - and the reality of an extremely harsh world kicks in. What then? The training

officer - Vivian Jenkins - in her speech, made a profound statement. Speaking about the national problems we were experiencing in Zimbabwe, and into which the teachers were being sent, and alluding to Jesus' statement about the wise and foolish men building their lives either on the rock or on sand, she said, *"It is a great privilege to have our foundations tested on a daily basis."*

I thought to myself, how true. I had just completed three grueling days where many things had gone wrong. My son working with me through it all, asked me, *"Why is it that everything is going wrong?"* He was feeling quite despondent by this time.

On the previous day he was shocked to the core when the Christian worker he was working with let the tractor's clutch slip, and in a split second fell and ended up under the wheels of the tractor, screaming out in pain. However, we prayed for the worker and the Lord healed him miraculously. No bones were broken.

On the day after the graduation ceremony, I came home with blood streaming from my face as a spanner I was working with slipped and hit me just above the eye. Within a half an hour of that, the bolts holding the tow hitch broke, and the heavy load I was towing went crashing to the ground. That among a lot of other difficulties. So, you understand his question, *"Why is it that everything is going wrong?"*

The question we always have to come back to in times of difficulty, is, *"What am I called to do?"* Actually, I was not really phased by all of this. I have had much more serious and stressful situations to handle - and the last few days was really nothing in comparison. However, for my son, still untrained in the university of life, these were difficult things - and he was

not even at the helm, having to make the decisions through it all.

## **The test of faith**

What an amazing university this is, the university of life! It sends you tests without announcement. Suddenly it says, “Hey buddy, today is testing day - ready or not!” How do we fare?

Viv’s statement was then so relevant. *“It is a great privilege to have our foundations tested on a daily basis.”* It is not a great tragedy to have our daily tests – rather, it is a great *privilege*. Why would she call it a *privilege*?

The reason is relatively simple. Faith is one of the most important attributes one can have as a Christian. The only way that faith can be called faith, is if it has been tested. A person who says he has faith, but has never experienced testing, does not know anything about faith.

The most significant test that faith can have, is the *test of endurance*. Abraham is cited as the *“father of faith”* and the way he became this was through many years of *endurance*. He had to hold on to the promises of God when it seemed absolutely impossible for those promises to be fulfilled. He had a mission in life – to provide an heir through which God would fulfil His promise for international blessing through the ages. Both Abraham and Sarah were moving further and further into the realm of impossibility as the years rolled by. Nevertheless, they held on – though everyone probably thought them crazy.

## **A dogged determination**

It's that dogged determination to keep a bulldog grip on the promise, no matter what the difficulties and impossibilities might be. That is what *builds character*. You see, faith, without Godly character, is worth nothing at all. So, God works *character* in us, as He tests our faith. It is not the hard times by themselves which make us into spiritual giants. If that were so, then all of Biafra and the Congo and Ruanda and Zimbabwe, etc. would be great spiritual giants. No, it is our positive response to the hard times which brings about that growth.

What makes us strong? It is simply many years of difficulties which we have been able to conquer, through the grace of God. If we have these victories under our belt - when the devil throws something else at us, we can say, *"Well, I've experienced that before, I won last time, and I can win again."* The more victories we have, the greater our *enduring power*. So, we should therefore *take each test as a great privilege and use it for our spiritual growth*.

## **Dismantling a furnace**

Some 16 years previously (1986), I had recently started my foundry and engineering business. I needed to buy a furnace. Discovering that a foundry in another city which was closing, was selling all their equipment, I decided to purchase their cupola furnace. Signing the cheque was the easy part. This furnace was built into the structure of their massive complex. It was standing some three stories high and would have to be cut loose from the structure and dismantled piece by piece. Then with heavy duty cranes it would need to be loaded onto a combined 15-ton truck and trailer - no mean task!

It was a Thursday morning, and I wanted the job done by the Saturday evening. I approached an expert rigger and asked if his company would dismantle the furnace for me. The man laughed at me and told me that it was impossible - it would take at least a week or two, and the entire foundry roof would have to be removed so as to allow large cranes to come in - all this of course at great expense.

That sounded like too much of a challenge to me, and I did not have the money for that kind of expense anyway. So, I started working with my small team of artisans and a set of Oxy / Acetylene bottles and a cutting torch. By midnight Saturday night, the truck and trailer were loaded, and the foundry roof was still in place. When the man who laughed at me walked in on the Monday morning, there was just a big gap where the furnace had been.

This is just one of many hundreds of experiences I have had in industry, and through it I have a good idea of what can or can't be done. Facing the near impossible challenges of life head on, and winning, gave me a victory experience which no one could take away from me. The same goes for the spiritual. If we will just put our head down and work through things, and gain our own victories through faith actions, we will become much stronger individuals. It is not the adverse circumstances themselves, but rather the victories we gain *in* those adverse circumstances which make us strong.

## **Training our children**

I answered my son's question, *"There is a devil out there who does not like what we are doing, and he would like to stop us. We must not allow him to do that. God is on our side, and it is He who has given us a vision. Now is the time to put our faith into action*

*and make the vision work.*” Leading by example is one of the best ways we can train our children.

Coming back to the young teachers, thrust into the world with such enthusiasm, I know that each one of them will be tested. When the test comes – don’t doubt your original vision. Let me put it this way:

*Don’t doubt in the darkness the calling which you received in the light!*

It is in that time of darkness of the wilderness, that the vision you received, might be the only flickering light you have. Whatever you do, don’t lose your grip on that original little light, however small and impossible it might seem!

*Heb 10:35 “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward,*

*10:36 “for you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”*

Think carefully about the following Scripture:

*2Cor 4:17 “... For momentary light affliction is **working for us** an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”*

The affliction is **working for us**. Say it again - *“Working for us ...”* Say it again - *“Working for us ... working for us ...”* The work it is doing for us is to make us more Christ-like. So that is good. It is to our eternal benefit. Endurance produces a strength and sweetness of character, together with a dogged determination that no demon in hell can hold back. When we endure through

the trials, we become a force to be reckoned with, and in this way the light of the gospel can shine out powerfully through us.

Of course there are also other aspects of character that He is working out in our lives at the same time - like humility in the place of our pride, gentleness and love in the place of harsh arrogance, etc.

May I suggest that we look at our circumstances, and then ask ourselves two simple questions:

1. What is the Lord teaching me in this?
2. Am I really hearing Him, or am I ducking and diving to avoid the lesson?

How are you faring in this university of life? The Bible says:

*Heb 13:5b "I will never leave you or forsake you."*

Do you acknowledge His presence in your circumstance?

### **It is not how we start the race, but how we finish it**

You see, as important as a good start may be in a race, it's not how we start the race that matters - it's how we finish it that determines our victory. Faithfulness and endurance are two godly characters which will most certainly be part of God's training program in this university of life. He is the training officer, and we are the pupils. It is the best university in the world. However, it does not guarantee a 100% success rate - as each of the students are given a free choice - to receive instruction or to reject it.

## At the end of life

It is at the end of life that we find out how well we have learnt at this university. Go to any old age home and you will see the end results of a lifetime of training. For many, their closing years are full of bitterness and heartache. But for others, the closing years are sweet and beautiful.

What makes the difference? I believe that a selfish lifestyle - seeking pleasure and fortune - will cut God's training program out of our lives. The end result will be disastrous - and unfortunately that is only discovered in old age when it is almost too late to change things. However, a lifestyle that *seeks the good of others*, and which is open to learning experiences, will result in a beautiful life filled with wisdom and godly character. The following Scripture has become somewhat of a life's goal for me:

*Psa 92:12-14 "The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon, planted in the house of YHWH. They will flourish in the courts of our God. They will **still yield fruit in old age**; they shall be full of sap and very green ..."*

I would like to be "*full of sap and very green ...*" when I am old - how about you? Now is the time to build those characteristics. Vivian was right.

"It is a **great privilege** to have our foundations tested on a daily basis."



## **A vessel of honour**

It is a privilege because that means God's hand is upon our lives daily, moulding us into the vessels of honour which He has planned for us to be.

*2Tim 2:21 "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a **vessel for honor**, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."*

Will you be a vessel of honour? Will you allow yourself to be trained by the Great Training Officer? Or would you rather have an easy, trouble-free lifestyle. What do you really desire for your life?

*2Cor 5:9 "Therefore also we have as our ambition ... to be pleasing to Him"*

May God make us more like Himself so that our lives may bring Him pleasure - may we submit to His university of life to be trained on His terms.

With special love to you all,

*Henry D Jackson*