



A Man Of Ethiopia

Samuel Degu Kebede

With Brendan McCauley

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A good head and a good heart
are always a formidable combination.

Nelson Mandela

If I push it, it is mine. If it flows, it is God's.

Jeffrey Huxley

CONTENTS

1	Lion In Zion	9
2	Big Loud Voice	19
3	Ethiopian Days	33
4	No Turning Back!	51
5	Bible School Days	59
6	Nigerian Days	83
7	O Canada!	105
8	Back To The Battle	119
9	War On The Saints	141
10	Ebony & Ivory	151
11	Money Talks!	169
12	Meeting Haile Selassie	183
13	Bringing Joy To Jesus	189
14	Regrets? I Have A Few	209
15	Give Me This Mountain	229

1.

Lion In Zion

There's always a lion in Zion. A powerful one prowled closer and closer as we huddled together. We knew our lives hung in the balance for life and death were in the power of his tongue. Some said he was a God. To them he was *HIM, Jah, Jah Rastafari*. Others called him *Janhoy, Talaqu Meri, Abba Tekel*.

He named himself *King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Elect of God, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Power of the Trinity, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I*.

His eyes caught my gaze and the oxygen failed. He growled, Are you Pentes?

I froze. Pentes was a derogatory term coined by the Orthodox Church. They used it to mock Christians who'd experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

I said, Your Majesty, some call us Pentes but we're just Christians like Jesus said we should be.

We Christian leaders were standing in the Imperial Palace surrounded by the seated Ethiopian Orthodox Pope and his senior churchmen. The military were shutting our churches and throwing us into jail. It was the 1960s. The world was in turmoil. A battle waged for the heart and soul of Ethiopia.

Atheistic communism on every corner seducing us with her empty promises. At the same time God was on the move. Multitudes of young Ethiopians were being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Signs and wonders abounded. The Orthodox Church feared losing control. They encouraged the military persecution. We decided to plead our case before Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie.

We waited at a spot he passed when he walked from his living quarters to the palace. We shouted, Father Haile Selassie, please hear our case. He said, Let them come! So we entered his lair. The Orthodox Pope and his entourage were summoned.

I said, Your Majesty, you have given us religious freedom but the police and army are persecuting us and closing down our churches.

The Pope cleared his voice. The *Lion* nodded him permission to speak. He said, Father Haile Selassie, don't listen to these evil Pentes. They aim to destroy our Holy Church.

Is this true? the *Lion* asked.

I said, No Father. If this were true would God have opened up this opportunity for us to plead our case before you?

A young priest said, Your Majesty, in other countries these Pentes are being shot as cultic people.

The Pope said, Father, you are called by God to defend the Orthodox Church. These Pentes are hell bent on destroying that church. Many of our poor people are being deceived into joining them. For the sake of Ethiopia you must stop them before they turn the whole nation upside down.

The Lion closed his eyes and sighed. He said, Okay, I'll establish a committee to look into this.

We knew we'd lost.

The committee of Orthodox Church people ruled that all Pentes should be caught and killed. They produced a *Most Wanted* list. My name was on it. Kebede Degu. But praise God I'm a survivor. I've lived to tell the tale. To this day, Jesus the true *Lion of the Tribe of Judah* has always provided me a way of escape

Soon after that meeting Christians began to dream that Haile Selassie's time was over. Some saw dreams with writing like *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin*. Haile Selassie had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

One believer saw a vision of a chariot of fire removing Haile Selassie from his throne. Another woman dreamed he was dead. The police imprisoned her.

They said, You're a liar. Father Haile Selassie is not dead. He is alive.

She said, Because he no longer stands for righteousness he's as good as dead.

I believe communism wouldn't have captured Ethiopia if Haile Selassie had allowed the Holy Spirit free rein in our nation. Communism was a judgment because those in authority hindered the work of the Holy Spirit. They stopped the revival.

If a government or a denomination won't deal righteously with God's people they'll always be severely punished. The red revolution quickly turned into genocide. Before this Pentecostals were praising God all over the country. They were praising him in the universities. There was great revival. Like the Jesus People in America. Ethiopia's youth turning to the Lord in droves.

Even hippies with large Afros came to share the
Gospel with us.

One of our revival songs went,

Move on brothers,
Move on sisters.
This is the moving day.
Move a little closer,
Take a stand with Jesus
Move on brothers, move on.

I heard the Master calling
Under the mulberry tree.
I know, I know, I know,
The move is on.

So many new songs! We sang about joy, about
freedom, about salvation. The whole city was on fire.
We sang in homes, in the streets and in prisons. We
couldn't stop praising. On the buses everyone would

join in. Amazing days. I believe God knew atheistic communism desired to eat up Ethiopia and he gave us all a good chance to turn to him. Second Chronicles says, If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

God wanted to bless Ethiopia but because the government and the church refused the Holy Spirit and persecuted his people he gave Ethiopia over to communism and famine. If a nation will not serve God they will be allowed to go their own way, which is always the way of death. There is no middle ground in this spiritual battle over the lives and destinies of families, peoples, churches and nations. The young Ethiopian priest who said cultic Pentes like us were being shot was himself killed by a communist bullet in the very same room he spoke those words.

Five years before communism devoured Ethiopia the Lord had me prophesy to a congregation of over two thousand people. He said, Prophecy like Isaiah. I stripped to the waist and proclaimed, We the Pentecostal people in Ethiopia are half naked and half dressed. We don't worship the Lord with all our hearts. We are half anointed and half barren. We are

empty and dry. A sword is coming to Ethiopia.
Blood will run like a river. Brother will kill brother.

Five years later our whole nation was indeed a bloodbath and those young Christians whose parents wouldn't allow them to become Pentecostals became communists instead. In place of the loving life giving Holy Spirit we welcomed the vicious death making spirit of Marxism. Atheistic Communism is a spirit from hell that brings bondage instead of freedom, sadness instead of joy and death instead of life. It is a pitiless master that destroyed over a million and a half Ethiopians.

For millennia we worshipped God. We prayed, Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth. We read and quoted from our Bible. The communists stole our churches and worshiped Mao Tse-tung. They chanted, Our father who art in China, hallowed be thy name, thy will be done on earth. They read Mao's little red book and were forever quoting his words.

They also called upon the names of Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara but these names couldn't save them or their children. There is no other name under heaven or earth by which men can be saved except the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Ethiopia's young people willingly gave their lives for communism. When dying in battle they'd bravely stick their fingers in their own blood and write, We will die but our politics will win. They perished believing a lie. Many Christians are not willing to die like this for the Gospel. An entire generation of young Ethiopians were wiped out fighting for Communism. The fathers of the nation refused the Holy Spirit and the children paid the price.

The same thing happened in Germany in 1909 in *The Berlin Declaration*. Evangelical German theologians refused to allow the Holy Spirit Movement to come into Germany and instead they received an evil fascist spirit that killed millions of people in two world wars. An evil spirit from Hell that caused Germany to massacre six million Jews. It's an awful thing to refuse the Holy Spirit.

I'm convinced if Haile Selassie had allowed God's Holy Spirit freedom to work in Ethiopia then he would have remained in power and God would have blessed us.

Now we'd be the head and not the tail wandering from one hungry famine to another. Our university students would've turned to Christ instead of Marx and the glory of God would've returned to our nation.

But we missed our day of visitation. Like the Jews of Jesus' day we chose Barabbas and we suffered for it.

It could all have been so different.

So very different!

2.

Big Loud Voice

With hindsight it's easy to see God's fingerprints on our lives. He told Jeremiah, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart for my holy purpose. God knows exactly why he created us but unless we are born again of his Spirit we'll never know or achieve our potential. Therein lies the adventure.

I was born in Ethiopia. Satan tried to prevent my life before I was even conceived. My father was an Orthodox Christian, a Second World War veteran and a patriot. An unsung hero of the Italo-Ethiopian war against fascism of 1935-1941. An Italian bullet in his back paralysed him. The doctors gave no hope of recovery. The family prepared for his death in the Orthodox way, holding special ceremonies to have his soul released from purgatory; prayers at twelve days, forty days, six months and a year.

But Dad had wanted to live and have a son. Against the odds, after a year, his strength returned. Mourning blossomed into happiness. Spring had returned like a child that knows poetry. In Ethiopia when a thing of great joy comes the people will shoot a gun. A banquet table was spread and Dad's rusty rifle fired. Its fading echo still ricocheting down the years reminds me that nothing is impossible with God.

Afterwards other guns were shot but rarely in joy. During World War Two, Haile Selassie fled to England and militants like Dad opposed his return. He's a coward, they said. We don't want this man to rule over us. Nevertheless the Emperor returned and Dad was back in the bush with the rebels and Mom was pregnant with my second sister. They named her Tafsu, which in Amharic means *gathered and locked*

up for at that time Ethiopian patriots were being *gathered and locked up* by the army.

Boys are highly prized in Ethiopia. In my hometown of Akaki a Seventh Day Adventist group had been visiting the locals and witnessing about Jesus. They offered Dad a portion of John's Gospel. Dad was illiterate. Yet he took the Gospel. He said, I can't read but I'll make you a promise. If God blesses me with a son I'll send him to school. Only he will read this Gospel for me. Otherwise it will never be read.

He placed the Gospel in a small wooden box and like his ancestors he waited patiently for God. A few years later his old rebel gun announced my birth. Then the fire fell! Mom and I were in bed behind a curtain in a little dark room. When Dad heard my cry he rushed in with a candle to see me.

He shouted, A fantastic looking boy. Just like me!

He was careless with the candle. The curtains caught ablaze and fell upon me. So I was baptised in fire long before I was ever baptised in water or the Holy Spirit. Maybe like Jeremiah some of that fire got into my bones and has kept me going until these days of my old age.

God blessed me with a good set of lungs. Dad called me, *Gurara*, which means loud voice. He said I sounded more like a big man than a baby. He often boasted, One day this big loud voiced son of mine will read the Gospel to me. And on one happy day, aged eight, I finally stood before Dad and fulfilled his prayer. I read from John's Gospel. I can still remember Dad's amazement at the part where Herodias told Salome to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Dad said, What kind of evil is this? What does she gain when John dies? This is nothing but pure hatred.

Monks from the nearby monastery often visited us. We'd wash their feet, feed them and let them rest on our beds. Two such monks arrived in the middle of me reading this story. They sat with my father and listened.

One said, This boy has a great voice. He should be given to our monastery as a Gospel preacher. Dad flared up. He said, Why do you want my son to be a preacher? People who preach suffer too much. They have no income and are always persecuted. Do not wish that for my son. He has to be a doctor or a lawyer. Preaching is not a good job for him.

Maybe Dad was being prophetic for if you are a Third World preacher it's unlikely your children will follow in your footsteps for all they ever see is the suffering and the persecution. Yet the monks were also prophetic for in time God called me to use my big loud voice to preach his Holy Word. God's plans and purposes were not that I should have a happy comfortable life. His plans were the same as they have always been. That I should be conformed to the image of his son Jesus and work for the expansion of his kingdom upon the earth. We are all called to do that.

Shortly after the monks' visit there was a cholera epidemic. I almost died. My family had already started the death wail. The people gathered to keen about my death. One day I woke up and saw an open vision in which a white man dressed in military uniform entered our house on a white horse. He dismounted and sat on my bed. He laid his hand upon me and said, Kebede don't be afraid. This sickness in not unto death. When he said this I was so happy. I sat up in bed and shouted to all the mourners, Can't you see this white man and his white horse? He says I am going to live and not die. They thought I was hallucinating. When I recovered the people wouldn't believe this vision was of Jesus. Some said it must have been St. George. Over time they forgot all about it but I have never forgotten it.

God knows us so well. Psalm 139 says,

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because
I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together
in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

Our days are numbered in God's hands. He knows how long we should live on this earth. I don't believe everything the doctor tells me. No curse, demon or sickness will take me before my time. I certainly

don't believe in euthanasia. God knows the length of my days. He knows how long we need in order to finish our race.

I was the only boy in our family. My father spoiled me. He wanted to know my future so he'd take me to visit every magician and witch he could find. It was a pagan wizard who told Dad I should be named Kebede. Kebede means heavy presence of God. It's a Hebrew word translated throughout the Old Testament as *Glory* but its root meaning is heaviness or weight, like when the Kabod – the presence of the Lord came into the temple. Kebede is a common Ethiopian name. If you shouted Kebede in Addis Ababa half the city might turn around.

After I became a Christian I didn't like that a wizard had named me. I wanted to change my name many times. A few years ago I was praying when the Lord spoke to me and said he was going to give me an anointing like the prophet Samuel who had a threefold ministry of prophet, priest and judge. He told me, You can judge the nations because you have suffered and paid the price. You will judge the nations in righteousness. He also said, You will bring reconciliation amongst the people. You will help break down the walls of tribalism and division within the churches. At that time the Ethiopian government

was promoting tribalism, preferring their own tribe above others. Repackaged racism like in South Africa. Sometimes it seems we have learned nothing from the horrors of apartheid.

God said as a priest I'd bring reconciliation amongst the people. Before change occurred in South Africa it was Christian leaders like Michael Cassidy and Desmond Tutu who brought confession and reconciliation. From the church it spread to the government. It's often the church that either causes division or reconciliation within a nation. The church as the voice of God is the determining factor.

I'm now called Samuel Degu Kebede. I've kept Kebede as my surname. I don't want my wife's and my children's surname to have to be changed all over again. The name Kebede is part of my history. Changing names is biblical. Abram became Abraham, Sara became Sarah, Jacob became Israel, Saul became Paul and Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter. A name change has important prophetic connotations. Paul Yonggi Cho is now called David Yonggi Cho. It all depends upon your ministry and its changing vision and sphere of influence. There's always a prophetic and significant meaning when God changes your name. You can't simply change your name yourself. It is God who changes names and

changes times and seasons. Just like you can't choose your own ministry. It is God who calls, chooses and establishes us in ministry.

After this *name change* encounter with God I began to write a monthly newsletter called *Speak Out*, from the incident in 1 Samuel 3:15-20. Each topic in *Speak Out* is received by revelation. I recently wrote about vision. If you have a genuine heavenly vision you'll pay a big price. A heavenly vision helps us to endure. In 2nd Corinthians, Paul says he could only depend on the heavenly vision he'd received from the Lord. That's how he survived. Our dreams and visions enable us to persist to do God's will.

Remember Joseph? His parents and brothers were all in his dream. They wanted to come out of his dream. They wanted to kill him. They wanted to destroy the dream but they never could come out of the dream. At the end of the day the dream came to pass. You can't escape from the dream. Dreams from God are the stuff of life. I am an intercessor. My days are spent in prayer. It's our relationship with the Lord that matters. It's not what we do that counts. It's how we relate to God. John Chapter 15 says, If you abide in me and my word abides in you, you will be fruitful. But if we aimlessly run here and there chasing after

illusions nothing of lasting substance will happen.
We need God's vision for our lives.

Normally boys relate well to their mother but this didn't happen for me. Dad was the greater influence. I loved Dad but found it difficult with Mom. She was a strong lady. She constantly fought with Dad and the neighbours. Dad was a humble person. No match for Mom. He'd just leave until she cooled down. Dad died in his early sixties and Mom lived until she was almost ninety. She was a fiery woman with a fiery tongue. I think Mom had the blood of the Jews. She'd never eat meat from the thighbone of an animal. Jacob said the Lord touched his thigh so from then onwards the children of Israel would not eat thighbone meat. Mom often said, My tribe will not eat this meat. If we do all our teeth will fall out.

In Orthodox Coptic culture if you don't have a son you can go outside the marriage and get one with a concubine. One day Dad said, Kebede I can't go and get a brother for you from outside my marriage. Even though your mom burns me with her tongue I'll be faithful to her. God gave me this woman and I'll live with her until I die. That's the legacy I got from my dad. Be faithful in spite of all the suffering you may have with your wife. My sisters are still alive. They are called Wogey Ehu, Tafsu and Desta. Wogey Ehu

means *I have been respected*. Tafsu means *gathered and locked up* and Desta means *joy*. They're all grandmothers now. They still live near our childhood home about twenty kilometres from Addis Ababa.

We were not poor. We had cows. Dad always encouraged me to be creative in the midst of poverty and famine. Once during the school holidays, shortly after my vision of Jesus, Dad gave me 25 cents for a piece of candy. I thought, I don't want to buy a candy and so quickly consume all my money. Instead I bought a small fishing hook and asked Mom for some twine which I attached to an old bamboo stick. Next morning I walked to the lake and by noon had caught a basketful of fish. I gave some to Mom. The rest I sold to rich foreigners. With this money I bought lots of candy. But instead of eating it all I went to the nearby railway station and sold some to waiting passengers.

Thereafter my daily routine became fishing, selling fish and selling candy. When school reopened I felt like a millionaire. I'd enough money to buy clothes for Dad, clothes for myself and a new exercise book and pencil. Dad was so proud. He said, Kebede you're a good boy. You have multiplied that 25 cents many times. He blessed me. He said, You will never

die young. You are a survivor. I believe in you. I can depend on you. You will live long and prosper.

Ethiopians were not encouraged to be open to new ideas. The priests feared education would lessen their power over us. I've always endeavoured to improve my situation. Was always interested in better ways of thinking. I worked hard and I read books. That was my life. There is a beggar mentality in Ethiopia. People have been taught that begging is a holy thing. Some beg instead of working.

Even today many Ethiopian NGO's (Non-Governmental Organisations) are nothing more than professional beggars. Systematically they beg for us from place to place, from nation to nation. This should not be.

As Christians we may mention our need. Then people of faith can respond appropriately. Some may become challenged by the needs of the Ethiopian church. Believers in the Third World suffer greatly from lack of finance and resources; nevertheless they must never become beggars.

Psalm 37 says,

I was young and now I am old,
Yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
Or their children begging bread.

They are always generous and lend freely;
Their children will be blessed.

The Bible says we should come boldly before the throne of grace and make our requests known. We should never beg. We are children of God. In Ethiopia we believe in sustainable development. We may need help to get started but we should aim to function on our own after that. The old adage holds true, Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to fish and you feed him for life.

Once we are up and running we must be capable of sustaining on our own. Otherwise people will become fed up with having to support us year in year out. If I'd used the 25 cents my dad gave me to buy candy I'd have had to wait until I got another hand-out. Instead I used the gift to better my own situation and the condition of others. God expects us to use our gifts and resources for the spread of his kingdom. He expects us to buy fishhooks and go fishing for men

and women for his kingdom. Not just become consumers of others' experiences.

I'm constantly amazed at the amount of money Western Christians spend on themselves. Many live in panelled houses while billions in the rest of the world are starving for natural and spiritual food. One day we will all stand before Jesus and give an account of how we used our talents and time.

There is a day fast approaching when I'll stand before God like I stood before my earthly Dad so many years ago. I want to hear God say what Dad said, Good boy, you have multiplied that which I gave you. You did not consume it on yourself. I'm proud of you.

I pray you and I will be able to give a good account to Jesus of how we used our time and talents for the expansion of his kingdom. Making disciples of nations is costly. We're all commanded to go or to enable the gospel to go. In the Great Commission Jesus looked beyond Judea and commanded the gospel to be offered to all nations. We are to make disciples. That's why we were born. This is why God has blessed us. Let's not spend all our resource on candy. Let us gladly receive all that God has for us and let us bear lasting fruit for the Kingdom of God.

3.

Ethiopian Days

God loves Ethiopia. Ethiopia is mentioned over sixty times in Scripture. Second only to Israel. In Amos 9:13 God asks, Are you Israelites more important to me than the Ethiopians? There are many promises concerning Ethiopia. Psalm 68 says, Ethiopia will soon stretch out her hands unto the Lord. Scripture also says, You crushed the head of the dragon and gave food for the Ethiopians.

I believe one day the head of the dragon will be crushed and the Blue Nile will be returned to us. Another scripture says, Strangers will not drink your water. Strangers will not eat your fruit.

Ethiopia was called Abyssinia and Cush in the Bible. At one time Ethiopia was comprised of Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, and Yemen. We were a great trading nation. Ethiopia was a civilisation full of knowledge, riddles and wisdom. The Queen of Sheba tested Solomon with her many riddles. Ethiopians believe the Garden of Eden was here. In the book of Genesis it says the Gihon River waters Eden. Gihon is the Ethiopian name for the Blue Nile. I believe the cradle of civilisation started in Ethiopia. Ethiopia was once a prosperous country. That's why the Axum Obelisk is there. Ethiopia has *Lucy*, the oldest dated remains found of a person in the world.

Ethiopia has a rich culture and a rich knowledge of civilisation but unfortunately Haile Selassie acted very foolishly. He became involved with the Rastafarians and allowed himself to be worshipped. For the sake of oil he abandoned the Jews and supported the Palestinians. He opened a Palestinian Embassy in Ethiopia and kicked out the Israelis. This was the beginning of the end. The glory departed and communism came.

Ethiopia suffered under communism for 17 years, from 1974 – 1991. Poverty spread like an epidemic. My constant prayer for my homeland is that God will restore the years the communists have eaten.

I believe there'll be revival in Ethiopia. I always pray Ethiopia will soon stretch her hands unto the Lord. The best is yet to be!

The Falasha are black Ethiopian Jews. Over 70,000 of them have been air lifted back to Israel. In Israel I have preached in a Messianic Jewish church comprised mainly of Ethiopian Falasha Christians. There are possibly thirty churches like this in Israel. All their services are in Amharic, Ethiopia's national language. Under communism Ethiopians were scattered all over the world but like the Jews they keep their own culture, worship and food.

Emigrant Ethiopians send money back to their families. In the past it was all brain drain but nowadays many educated, well-qualified and economically well-off Ethiopians are returning home. As in Psalm 127, Those who go out carrying seeds with tears will doubtlessly return carrying sheaves with them. I believe the glory days will return. The Gospel came to Ethiopia over 1600 years before it ever came to North America.

Because of our connection with Israel through the Queen of Sheba the eunuch in Acts 8 went up to Jerusalem to observe the Jewish law. Yet he was able to complete the pilgrimage and still not know Jesus. This is so typical of my people. But God had mercy and sent Phillip to reveal Jesus and to baptise him. The Lord chose Ethiopia to bring the good news to all of Africa.

In the fourth Century Ethiopian Christianity was corrupted by the Egyptian Coptic church. Many cultic beliefs came to us at this time. Egypt is well known for magicians, freemasons and mystery religion. They taught us black magic. Ethiopian Orthodox priests still practise magic alongside Christianity. Many are educated people with secret occult knowledge. They can send a demon to attack and even kill you. Because of this Christian missionaries experience great opposition in Ethiopia.

The Orthodox Church crowned Haile Selassie. He was called the defender of the faith. This resulted in missionaries, evangelists and especially Pentecostals, being badly persecuted. I personally was jailed four times under his reign for my Christian beliefs. In those days Christian missionaries were not allowed to baptise people or build churches. They were only

allowed to do social work, build hospitals, clinics and so on.

Even today we are still hampered by these limitations. I'm still trying to build a church in Addis Ababa in place of the plastic tent structure we have. Most Ethiopians believe they are Christians since childhood, even though they have no relationship with Jesus or his Holy Spirit. There is still great resistance to the Gospel in Ethiopia. It's just like preaching to Jews. There's a veil over the eyes of my people.

Once I was with my friend Kassaye Degefu in a place called Mekele in the north of Ethiopia. We'd been preaching in the open air for three days. On the fourth day, a Sunday, we'd a meeting with some students in a Lutheran hostel. The Orthodox Church found out we were in town. The priests and their congregation along with a circus of onlookers and barking dogs came with sticks and stones to kill us.

The Lutheran pastor rushed in and said we had to leave immediately. He drove us to a hotel but the mob discovered where we were and surrounded the building. They shouted, Bring those bloody Pentes out! We will kill them. They started to smash the windows. The owner urged us to leave but we refused. Call the police, we said. This mob wants to

beat us to death. Soon the police came, sirens squealing. They fired guns, dispersed the crowd and jailed us. In court they told the judge, We found these people teaching this new doctrine. They were shouting Hallelujah and praying loudly.

The judge said, Are you accusing them because of their religion? Our leader Haile Selassie has said, We are one country but different religions. Religion is a personal matter. Muslims are crying out in the night. The Orthodox are crying early morning. I can't judge people for shouting and praying. I find these people not guilty. Let them go!

The police weren't happy. They said, Leave now or you'll be killed. They drove us thirty miles to Wokero and dropped us off. Within the hour we were preaching again. The Bible says if they put us out of one city we must go to the next city. Jesus assured us we'd not run out of cities to preach to until he comes back.

During those days because of persecution we started cell groups in our homes. There'd be fifty to sixty people in each cell. One group was arrested and taken to prison. Immediately twenty of us decided to pray and fast for their release. We went to a member's

home. The secret police followed us. In the middle of the night the door was knocked.

A voice shouted, Open the window, Pentes!

I opened the window and a soldier shone a torch in my face. He shouted, Hands up!

They claimed we were an unlawful assembly. They jailed us and shaved our heads. Then to our delight they put us in with our recently arrested friends. Now we were really a cell group. Some of us sewed embroidery on our clothes. My friend Mekru embroidered, *Jesus Saves* on the front of his T-shirt. In court, Mekru stood boldly at the head of our group with this sign, *Jesus Saves* right in front of the judge.

The judge shouted at Mekru, How dare you preach about Jesus in a court of law? Turn your face from me. The guards turned Mekru around. On the back of his T-shirt was embroidered, *Jesus Christ is Lord*. The judge was fuming. He gave us all a two years suspended sentence. If during those two years we were found preaching then the sentence would automatically apply.

We asked the judge, How can we stop preaching?
This is our calling from God.

The judge said, If you're caught preaching within two years you'll be thrown into prison. This is my calling from the law.

We continued to preach after our release. Kassaye Degefu and I were invited to take a student conference in Ambo. They were all young on-fire Christians. Had we cancelled they'd have considered us cowards. We consulted with our elders. They told us not to go. I talked with my wife Hamalemale. She said, What is the Lord telling you, my husband?

I told her the Lord had given me the scripture that says, Unless it is the will of your father none of your hairs will ever drop on the ground. God was telling me not to fear the rule of man but to follow the leading of God. Hamalemale told me to obey the Lord. I prayed, Lord I want to do your will whatever the cost. We stayed in a cheap hotel. I told Kassaye, I'll take the first session. You stay here and pray.

The conference was jam-packed with over a thousand students. They were on fire when I arrived. My own heart jumped with fear. I prayed, Lord, if fear comes

in through the window then faith goes out the door. Help me to be brave. I noticed a small room. I told the worship leader, Brother I'm going into that room to pray. Send for me when it's my time to preach. I went and prayed. After a while I looked at my watch and realised half an hour had passed. The singing had stopped. I opened the door and there was nobody there except for one old man. He said, Kebede, what are you doing here? The police came and took everybody to prison. Go through the back door for the police are still at the front of the building.

Back at the hotel, Kassaye asked, How was the meeting?

Wonderful, I said.

What kind of wonderful?

I told him the full story and we rejoiced that God had kept his word to me. Not one hair of my head was touched. When Hamalemale heard the conference had been busted she thought she wouldn't see me for two years because of the suspended sentence. But praise God, Jesus had delivered me from the devil's hand.

Another time we were in Ambo holding meetings. We slept during the day and we preached at night. After four days the Holy Spirit warned me to return to Addis Ababa. Out from this city. Go home to your wife, he kept repeating to my spirit. The Ambo pastors were annoyed. They said, Kebede the Lord is blessing this work. People are being saved and baptised in the Holy Spirit. Why are you leaving? I said I had to obey the inner witness of my spirit. We packed and left. That same day another travelling evangelist was passing through Ambo. He booked into the same hotel as us. When he tried to make contact with the local believers the police caught him and jailed him. They asked, Have you been preaching here these past four days?

The hotel staff came to his rescue. They said, This man has only checked in. The people you're looking for left early this morning. I knew nothing about this until Sunday service in our home church in Addis Ababa. This travelling evangelist was there. He said, I was in Ambo when the police arrested me and accused me of holding illegal meetings for four days. But the evangelists who'd done it had already escaped.

I was so happy the Lord had yet again protected me. Another time I was in Harare for three months.

Hamalemale was living in a tiny room at the back of the *Full Gospel Church*. In those days it was normal for me to be away for three or four months at a stretch without contacting my wife. When the Lord blessed me financially I'd always send some money to Hamalemale who was pregnant with our second child.

She was due that month. The elders said, Kebede you must go and see your wife. It takes a whole day to travel from Harare to Addis Ababa by bus. While I was travelling around sixty students were holding a prayer meeting in the place I'd just left. The police came and jailed them. The students phoned our Mother Church in Addis Ababa. They said, Kebede left us this morning by bus. Now we are locked up in prison. What will our Mother Church do for us? Please send Kebede back with some money to help our families.

When I arrived home the elders were waiting. They said, Kebede you are the only one the prisoners want. There is a train leaving tonight. Catch it and return to help your brothers in jail. What could I do? I spent a few minutes with my wife before I caught the train back to the imprisoned believers. Following Jesus was costly in those days yet we considered ourselves privileged to suffer for the sake of Christ. The Bible says if we suffer with him we shall reign with him.

Many times I escaped capture and seven times I was imprisoned. I was imprisoned four times under Haile Selassie and three times under communism. The overcrowded prisons were separated into male and female. Hundreds of us were squashed into a cell. Lice, skin rashes and disease spread like wildfire. Because of this they shaved our hair off. Many Ethiopian women have very beautiful long hair. Once all our arrested female choir members had their heads shaved. They looked like different people.

They stripped and deloused us. Our clothes were thrown into a large steaming drum that drained them of all colour. They came out so hot they'd burn your skin. Each day we were given one slice of poor quality bread and a small bowl of weak soup. We were always hungry. Relatives were allowed to send food to prisoners.

The problem was the Chief Prisoner and his cronies usually consumed this food. The Chief Prisoner is like a very controlling pastor who commands all the people underneath him with an iron fist. He is usually a strong violent person who can easily cower others. He carries a whip or a stick he uses liberally. His word is law. He can't be questioned. You have no rights in an Ethiopian prison.

If a family member sends a prisoner money the Chief Prisoner will keep it. Each cell has a Chief Prisoner that definitively merits St. Paul's title in 1 Timothy of *Chief of Sinners*. We weren't permitted to talk or pray. One hour daily we were allowed to exercise in a large field. There was a putrid toilet in the cell, an open hole. Many prisoners died because of the unhygienic conditions.

A long prison term is really a death sentence for the chances of catching a fatal disease are very high. People go crazy in prison. Many commit suicide. They can't handle the torment.

On Sundays visitors were allowed to come near the field during our one-hour exercise session. We could only see one another from afar through a fence. We'd shout and wave to each other. During one of these sessions a journalist from *Time Magazine* took our photograph and wrote an article about how Christian Ethiopia was persecuting Pentecostal believers. We were on the cover. I wish I'd a copy of it now.

Persecution and prison under Haile Selassie helped me to survive persecution and prison under communism. When the communists confiscated our churches I knew we'd survive. I've always known the church was more than a building and I knew Jesus had

promised us blessings with persecutions. Persecutions are sure to come to us all sooner or later. So many faithful Ethiopian Christians perished during the days of Haile Selassie and communism. So many martyrs whose stories will only be fully told in Glory. Many died in prison. Most just disappeared never to be seen again, their families never knowing where they were buried. Persecution and martyrdom brings unity to Christians. It brings a sense of oneness and gives them strength.

I heard a story about Australian wild horses. During the day these animals will roam freely but during the night they gather in a circle with their heads touching. If an enemy attacks they'll kick with their strong hooves and keep them at bay.

It was the same during persecution. The church was so strong. Christians loved one another. We stood together. But after communism fell instead of keeping our heads together in unity we began fighting over doctrine and theology. I can honestly say I've been more bruised and broken by persecution from fellow Christians than I've ever been from either Haile Selassie's government or the communists. We have more grace for persecution from unbelievers. Just think of the disciples in prison in the *Book of Acts*. They were always singing and rejoicing. It's

the persecution from brothers and sisters that hurts the most and wounds the longest.

Many Ethiopians suffered more than me. Many gave their lives for the Gospel. Many disappeared and many died in prison. God for his own purposes has kept me alive till now perhaps so that things done in darkness should be shouted from the rooftops. I never expected my Christian life to be easy. We were never taught the prosperity gospel. We were told we'd have to suffer and many of us would have to die in order to bring the Kingdom of God onto the earth.

We knew some of us would be brought before judges and courts and thrown into prison. We knew the true Kingdom of God involved suffering. Nowadays in the West we don't often hear this type of preaching. Instead people are told if they give their lives to Jesus then their lives will be happy and hunky-dory. People taught like this cannot stand when oppression comes.

In most Third World countries persecution and Pentecostalism go together for Satan desperately wants to stop the move of the Holy Spirit. Satan couldn't care less about denominational religion as long as it is lifeless and powerless. But he fears the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He knows the anointing destroys his kingdom.

Under both communism and Haile Selassie some Christian churches were in cahoots with the government. Just like in Russia there were open churches and underground churches. The open churches always compromised with the authorities and did as they were ordered. Some Ethiopian churches even studied Marxism and Leninism right in the pews on a Sunday morning. Some of the priests became involved in politics. They went to Revolution Square in Addis and chanted communist slogans like everybody else.

Most churches didn't want us Pentecostals near them. They considered our beliefs too dangerous. They refused to take communion with us. The Coptic Church and the Muslims worked with the government and they all remained open. It was only the Spirit filled Christians who were a threat to Satan and communism.

After the fall of communism many of these collaborators came back to Christianity. There are always those who will set their sails to the prevailing wind. Under communism many preachers became teachers paid by the government. When communism collapsed they came back to church and started preaching again. Some of them are now pastors and leaders. The Bible says the wheat and the tares both

grow together and the angels will separate them at the end. There are some matters best left with God.

The history of Christianity is the history of great compromisers. But we have the example of Jesus who never compromised the word of his father. He always did his father's will. That's my aim whatever the cost. The worst effect of communism was that it separated the fathers from the children. This is typical of Satan. The parents may be full of the Holy Spirit but Satan will try his damndest to make the children into secular humanistic materialists.

4.

No Turning Back!

The Lord warned us that communism was coming to Ethiopia. At the end of one of our meetings a musician sang a spontaneous prophetic song. The choir took it up and the Holy Spirit fell in waves upon the congregation. People started prophesying and speaking in tongues. The Lord quickened to my spirit the scripture that says, Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

I hesitated. I thought, If I prophesy this the people will think I'm a prophet of doom. My friend Mecru was there. He also has a gift of prophecy. The Lord gave him the exact same words as me. He stood up and boldly prophesied that persecution was coming upon our church. He said all Ethiopian Pentecostal churches would be forcibly shut, the shepherds would be struck and the sheep scattered.

Two English missionaries, Maureen Hutchinson and Helen Page, were also there. Afterwards they talked with my friend Kassaye Degefu and me. They asked us to bring this revival into their area amongst the pagan Afar people. Kassaye looked at me. We'd heard of the Afar. One of their rights of passage involved their young men cutting the penis of a complete stranger so as to prove they were now worthy of marriage. That's why there were only female missionaries amongst the Afar. I looked at Kassaye. He smiled. Then we laughed and started to sing, I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back!

The Afar area was mostly forest and desert. We travelled initially by biplane, then onwards by mule and finally by foot. Kassaye had a dream that was later published in, *The Herald of His Coming*. In his dream Kassaye was standing on top of a large rock

beneath a huge tree. He had a hammer in his hand. He was boldly hammering the rock. Eventually the rock cracked open and water gushed out. A voice said, In the future the Lord is going to build a church here and the Holy Spirit is going to pour out from this place. This was Kassaye's dream.

When we arrived in Rasa Goba the whole village were gathered together worshipping a huge tree. Chief Ato Ketema was officiating. I said to our group, Let's pray quietly. Immediately Kassaye became as bold as a lion. He prophesied, You'll all be ashamed of your idols. This tree is not a god. It is nothing. It will fall to the earth and be burnt in the fire.

Kassaye pushed through the crowd and preached about Jesus. He said, The God of heaven and earth has shown me a dream. On the very spot where this tree now stands there is going to be a Church of Jesus Christ. You're all going to know Jesus who died on another tree for your sins. This tree you are worshipping today will wither and die and from this very spot God's Holy Spirit will flow and you'll all be filled with his Holy Spirit. The people were shocked into silence. Kassaye stood and hammered the hard rock of superstition with the word of God. No one responded and we finally left in the midst of awful

quietness. I was so relieved we hadn't encountered any lovesick young men.

When Kassaye had his dream there wasn't one indigenous believer in the whole area but today there is a Pentecostal church where the tree used to be. Chief Ato Ketema is one of the elders. Afterwards Kassaye married Maureen Hutchinson and moved to England but they often return and minister in Rasa Goba. Kassaye still walks in his dream.

I always pray and wait on the Holy Spirit to show me what to do. One time he told me to go to Abse Teferi and preach about Jesus. I knew no one there. I took various buses and eventually reached Abse Teferi in the middle of the night with only two birr in my pocket. Early morning I found a tea stall and spent one birr on breakfast.

Soon school children appeared. I left my suitcase with the tea vendor and started to hand out literature and witness about Jesus.

I asked the children, Are there any Christians here who read the Bible?

They said there'd been English missionaries in Abse Teferi many years earlier. They mentioned a man called David Stokes. Now there was only one lady named Jemeneshe who lived up the mountain.

When I heard the name, Jemeneshe, the Lord said, That is the woman I've chosen to feed you. I found Jemeneshe and introduced myself. I said, God has sent me to preach the Gospel. She said, Praise the Lord. Does God remember me and send me a man of God after all these years? She killed a chicken and made a bed for me. She was married with children. Her husband, Mulugeta, was a pharmacy owner.

They'd a large grain store we cleaned out and opened as a meeting place. The word spread. All who came gave their lives to Jesus and were baptised in The Holy Spirit. This is how the first Abse Teferi Full Gospel church was established. It eventually grew into a very large church. Some of the folk converted in those days are now influential church leaders such as Zenebe Tesfaye, who is the Director of SOS, an international organisation for orphans. And Major Tezer Bekele, an overseer in Full Gospel Church and a senate leader.

My wife came with our son Bareket and we lived and ministered in Abse Teferi for four years. To augment

the meagre offerings I started selling Gospel books and portions of the Bible. This was how I met Abate Wolyensse, a forty-year-old social worker. He bought a book. He was a very strong Orthodox believer. He said he'd known of Jesus from childhood and started to argue with me.

We talked about the Ark of the Covenant, Mary, angels and the saints. I invited him to our church. Abate would argue about anything and everything but he'd never get offended. Neither would he accept Jesus as saviour. For one year this continued. Then one day he asked me to pray for him. He was addicted to tobacco and alcohol. He said, These things control me. I want to be free.

We laid hands on him and prayed. Immediately he was delivered, saved and baptised by the Holy Spirit. He started to speak in tongues. He was overjoyed. The spirit of evangelism came upon him. He started to preach to his wife and family. He caused a big disturbance at his work. He even preached to the Afar. Abate imagined God had given him a gift of tongues to talk to these people. We locked him in a house and started to teach him on the basics of Christianity.

When people are first saved the change is often tremendous. If you don't teach them they can destroy themselves by their naive enthusiasm. Because Abate kept witnessing to his work colleagues he was transferred to Bala Giba in the south of Ethiopia where he opened a church in his home, which became the first Mulu Wongel Pentecostal church in that area. In the end the government couldn't stick him any longer. They made him take early retirement. He came to Addis Ababa and found me. He said he wanted to bring the full gospel message to his birthplace of Bahir Dar in the North of Ethiopia.

I discussed this with a Swedish Pentecostal leader named Twagi Johansson. He agreed to support Abate and to supply him with Bibles. The north of Ethiopia is full of Orthodox monasteries and churches. Abate went and spoke to the Orthodox Pope and was given permission to distribute thousands of Bibles amongst the Orthodox people. This was during the time of communism when all Bibles had been confiscated and burnt. Abate said, Giving Bibles to people is like putting dynamite into their hands. Powerful!

One huge thorn in the flesh for Abate was the fact that his wife never accepted Jesus. She used to curse Abate. She said, Now you have accepted Kebede's faith. Look at all the trouble it has caused us.

Before he was a believer Abate was a very tough man. After he became a Christian and stopped being violent his wife used to mock him when he prayed. She'd also belittle him in front of their eight children.

One day he said, Kebede, what can I do? Should I divorce her?

I said, No. If she wants to live with you then live with her and love her. That's what the Bible says.

So he stayed with his wife. Abate Wolyensse was a hard working apostle. Now there are fifty or sixty churches in that area because of his efforts. One day the communists came and beat him to death. But the seeds he planted are still bearing lasting fruit for the Kingdom of God.

5.

Bible School Days

At the end of 1972 the Lord told me to go to Bible School. At that time I'd been an evangelist with the indigenous Mulu Wongel group of churches for over seven years. There was no salary or official position. I had to live by faith in the world's poorest country. It was a good training ground. The Mulu Wongel denomination had come into existence after the missionaries became fearful of speaking out for the Holy Spirit.

Swedish and Finnish Pentecostals arrived in Ethiopia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. But because of the sway the Orthodox Church held with Haile Selassie these new missionaries were not allowed to convert, baptise or open churches. They were only permitted to start schools and hospitals. This way they quietly spread the gospel. Some university students accepted Jesus as saviour and became very enthusiastic. They asked Chaha Omkea, an Kenyan evangelist, to hold a conference in the Swedish missionary compound in Awasha. The Orthodox Church opposed this. The worried Swedish and Finnish missionaries warned Chaha not to speak about the Holy Spirit or conversion.

Chaha said, The fearful Finnish are finished. He started to pray for Ethiopians to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues. Chaha Omkea was truly an icebreaker for the Holy Spirit in Ethiopia. I was converted in these early days. We soon realised foreign missionaries couldn't move the indigenous church forward. We understood we'd have to start our own churches with local self-supporting leadership. Soon the believing university students were assigned positions as teachers and government workers in various places. Wherever they went they started a church. People were being converted and baptised in the Holy Spirit at an amazing rate. All our songs were about the Holy Ghost:

It's the Holy Ghost and fire
That's keeping me alive!
Keeping me alive!
Keeping me alive!
It's the Holy Ghost and fire,
Keeping me alive!
Jesus is keeping me alive.

It's all over me and it's
Bubbling up inside!
Bubbling up inside!
Bubbling up inside!
It's all over me and it's
Bubbling up inside!
Jesus is keeping me alive!

This Holy Spirit fire spread all over Ethiopia. This was the start of the Mulu Wongel Full Gospel Church. They are a totally indigenous church; one of Ethiopia's biggest denominations. In order to build a

strong church you must start a self-supporting, self-propagating, self-administrating, indigenous church. Otherwise you're always under the restraint of the missionaries. Mulu Wongel didn't believe in Bible Schools in those days.

They used to say, A seminary is a cemetery. Why should we go there? When we say, In Jesus' name, do demons not come out? Remember the letter kills and the Spirit gives life. Knowledge puffs up, love builds up. We were all very anti-intellectual in those days favouring experience over theology.

When I asked the Mulu Wongel leadership for help in attending Nairobi Bible School they were not supportive. They said, Kebede, we can't help you. If you choose to go to Bible School you'll have to leave us. We won't support you. When I prayed about their decision the Lord gave me a word from Isaiah 45,

This is what the Lord says to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him
and to strip kings of their armour,
to open doors before him

so that gates will not be shut:
I will go before you
and will level the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.
I will give you the treasures of darkness,
riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the Lord,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

When I receive a rhema word from God I'll have faith and nothing moves me after that. Through this scripture I believed God was saying he'd open doors for me and provide whatever finance was necessary. I told my elders, The Lord has spoken to me. So whether you support me or not, I believe God will enable me to go to Bible School. I began to openly confess God was going to give me a hidden treasure so I could go to Nairobi. People began to hear of my decision. They watched to see what would happen.

I really appreciate my wife Hamalemale. She was never a stumbling block to my calling and ministry.

She always said, Go for it! At that time we had two children. Hamalemale had no money or job but she said, Don't worry Kebede. Just go! I can sell bananas on the street if I have to. I'll raise our two children. You just do the Lord's will and things will work out fine.

My Ethiopian friend Kassaye Degefu, who had married Maureen Hutchinson from *The Red Sea Mission Team*, was now living in England. When they heard my heart was set on Bible School they paid my first year's fees. Other Ethiopian believers raised funds for my ticket to Nairobi.

At this time God opened me up to the wider body of Christ. Most of 1973 was spent working in a leprosy rehabilitation centre. This taught me forbearance. I learned to be patient and kind with people in bad situations. In October I went to Nairobi. Bible School was a huge change from living-by-faith as an evangelist. Because of my ministry experience they credited me one year off their three-year course. I found favour both with the white English *Assemblies of God* folk that ran the Bible School and with the black students. All students had to work one and a half hours per day cleaning the toilets, digging the garden, washing the windows, etc. I was given the task of assigning the work and overseeing it.

I had a song to inspire us. I'd sing,

When we all pull together, together, together.

When we all pull together, we'll have joy.

Your work is my work.

My work is your work.

Our work is God's work.

When we all pull together, together, together.

When we all pull together we'll have joy.

The students claimed I was a hard taskmaster. When they saw me they'd shout, Pharaoh, let my people go! Let my people go! This Ethiopian, Kebede has come to colonise us. I enjoyed my leadership position. At the end of my first year the teachers clubbed together and bought a ticket for me to go and see my wife and children.

I asked Hamalemale, My wife how is it with you and the children?

She said, My husband before you went to Bible School I was looking to your hand to supply my needs but now I am looking to the hand of the Lord and I've found the Lord's hand is better than your hand.

One church asked me to share about Bible School. I quoted from Proverbs 31. In front of everyone I said, Many women have done good things, but Hamalemale my wife, will surpass them all. I really praised her that day because the truth is I couldn't have gone to Nairobi without her encouragement. Hamalemale was a good woman. I love that woman. Her memory is very dear to me. I look forward to seeing her again in Heaven.

Our Bible School teachers were all middle-aged, middle-class, English Pentecostals. They didn't want us involved with American Christianity or Kenyan culture. They said Kenya was a polluted society. They were isolationist in ethos with a colonial attitude towards all things. They were strict disciplinarians. They didn't trust us. If we left the school premises we'd to sign out and sign back in. Our Bible School was remote. We had to walk miles to the nearest bus stop.

The students who'd been in ministry for years were enthusiastic and radical while the teachers were academic and conservative. They made us wear three-piece suits and ties in the classroom. They also made us use knives and forks. We had to eat *Ugali* with a fork. Ugh! It was awful not feeling the texture before we ate it. I often wondered if they thought Jesus wore a three-piece suit and ate with a knife and fork.

The students were from all over Africa. My best friend was an Ethiopian called Mekru, a very militant Christian. Once we acted a drama based on the letter of Philemon from the New Testament. Mekru acted the part of the slave Onesimus and took great delight in strutting about shouting, Freedom! Freedom! This was a long time before Mel Gibson did the same thing in *Braveheart*.

One of us acted the slave master Philemon in an English accent. Another played the part of Paul in an open African way. We were attempting to expose the racist attitudes of our teachers. In reality we could never openly verbalise our concerns for fear of being kicked out of the school. Some teachers liked the drama but others were not well pleased. They marked us Ethiopians as troublemakers.

My favourite teacher was Jeffrey Huxley. I really appreciate that man. He was gentle and humble. He's had a massive influence on my life. I still remember his maxims. He'd say, The way up is the way down. Often when we students were doing manual labour he'd come and work alongside us. Although he was an older person he was not proud and standoffish like many of the faculty. No one has ever impressed my life like Jeffrey Huxley. He is the one who organised the ticket for me to visit my family in Ethiopia. He believed in me. He said he knew I'd be a good leader and that I'd serve the Lord for the rest of my life.

His favourite axiom was, If I push it, it is mine. If it flows, it is God's. I often use his wisdom in my preaching. I can't take him out from my life. He was such a great man. He opened the Word of God to me and taught me to love it. He taught us eternal security from the book of Romans. Before this I didn't believe in eternal security. I thought my salvation could slip out from my hand at any moment. He gave me vibrancy and strength by his words. He taught me about the grace and the love of God. I remember coming out of his classes with the love of God bursting my heart. He taught from the *Book of Acts* about our miracle working God. He taught us how to use and not lose or misuse one's spiritual gifts. He opened the book of Corinthians for us. How powerful and lasting are the words of a good teacher.

Jeffrey Huxley died in Africa where he lectured for most of his life. He was over eighty. His wife was eighty-four when I last saw her. I don't know where he's buried but I know his heart is in Africa. Africa was his inheritance. God will not forget Jeffrey Huxley. The Huxleys retired to England but couldn't any longer recognise a country that had grown so materialistic and secular. After a year and a half they returned to their beloved Africa and Jeffery started lecturing again in the same Bible School. This was his life. I so look forward to meeting Jeffrey Huxley in Heaven and hearing the sound of his gentle voice again, If you push it, it is yours. If it flows it is God's.

Jeffrey Huxley was open hearted but some other teachers were very rough with us. One said he didn't believe in intercultural marriage. He sent his daughter to South Africa so she would be safe in the apartheid system. He said if she was in Nairobi she might mix with a black person and fall in love with him. He said, Mixed marriages don't work. Around this time the School Principal created a job in his home for a dishwasher. Mekru who needed the money got the job. One day he arrived back with a very nice cake.

I asked, Who gave you this cake?

The Principal's daughter, he smiled.

Why did she give you such a cake?

She sympathises with me. Sometimes she even comes and helps me wash the dishes.

You're being paid to wash the dishes!

Bible School food was skimpy and of poor quality. Mekru's cakes were manna from heaven. Sometimes he'd bring leftovers from the master's table; meat, chicken, rice. We started to put on weight.

The Principal's daughter was called Margaret. Mekru said, Everyone in the Principal's house has a nap after lunch. That's when Margaret comes and talks with me.

I said, Mekru be careful. Very careful!

Then one Sunday after church, there was a big hullabaloo. Mekru and Margaret disappeared into the forest. Someone said, Maybe they're kissing. The Principal went buckmad. Lunch was cancelled and we were all dispatched to look for Romeo and Juliet. People went on foot, by bicycle, horse and car.

Mekru! Mekru! Margaret! Margaret! echoed a chorus of hungry cuckoos.

They returned after dark. Margaret was immediately whisked off to hospital to be examined. Then the sky fell on our heads. There were board meetings about expelling Mekru but because it was his final year it was decided to let him finish the course. Faculty, students and board members were all assembled together. We students were warned if we ever so much as flirted with our eyes with a white girl we'd be immediately expelled.

I talked with Mekru. I said, Please leave this thing alone?

He said, I can't. I love her too much

Margaret used to come to Mekru's window in the middle of the night and watch him while he slept. In the end the board decided the Principal should take Margaret back to England before the term was finished. And then quick as a flash Margaret was gone, Mekru was heart broken and we were tightening our belts again.

Bible School changed my worldview. There I discovered the Pentecostal experience was not a denomination. In Nairobi you could be a Catholic and baptised by the Holy Spirit, you could be Orthodox and baptised by the Holy Spirit, you could be Baptist and baptised by the Holy Spirit. I met people from all denominations who were filled by the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.

I realized we'd been too narrow in our thinking in Mulu Wongel. We thought we were the only people saved and baptised in the Holy Spirit. We had far too small a vision of the body of Christ. If someone left us and joined another church we'd say they were backslidden. We despised liturgy and ceremony mainly because of the lifeless sermons we'd endured in our youth. God opened me up to the whole church, the whole world. I began to appreciate the scripture that says, The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

Mindless attachment to our local church and denomination can become as an idol. My church. My people. I'm a Baptist. I'm a Catholic. I'm a Pentecostal. We have the full truth. We are what God is doing on the earth today. It's so easy to become proud and deceived. Even our nationality can become an idol. I used to say, God has called me for Ethiopia.

My anointing is double when I preach for Ethiopians.
I was wrong.

One day Jeffrey Huxley tapped me on the shoulder. He said, Kebede, you are too ethnocentric. Christianity is not merely national. It is international. It's Christ for all nations. From then onwards I came out from my shell of a denominational and nationalistic spirit. I became open to the worldwide body of Christ. After Nairobi Bible School I re-joined the Mulu Wongel congregation but discord arose between those of us who attended Bible School and those who didn't. Someone said, Will these Bible School fellows receive more favour than the rest of us? Are we less Christian? I only lasted six months.

When it became known I had an interdenominational mindset I was invited to join Scripture Union and work amongst interdenominational university students. The Mulu Wongel people now considered me totally backslidden. I worked with Scripture Union for five years as the organising secretary and director of the work. I was trained in Lusaka, Zambia, for three months. I really enjoyed meeting students and leaders from different denominations and cultures. I loved the great variety of the body of Christ. Scripture Union's motto was *Teach and Trust*.

We taught a student and then trusted him as a group leader in his school or university. We also trusted that God could lead his own people.

When the communists took over in 1974 all foreign missionaries were expelled. This was a mixed blessing. On one hand it necessitated the growth of indigenous leadership. On the other hand it left us penniless. With the missionaries gone the Baptist church in Addis Ababa was left leaderless. I was asked to be the full-time pastor working alongside a part-time pastor. There were a hundred regular members and perhaps three hundred non-attending members on the rolls.

Some of the Full Gospel people who knew me joined the church. We started to pray about revival. Soon the church was transformed. People began to be baptised in the Spirit with speaking in tongues, prophecy, scripture reading and an increased faith and prayer life. Within a few years the membership grew from a nominal three hundred to a vibrant three thousand. Students from the nearby university joined us. Now they are doctors, engineers and other professionals.

So many healings happened in that church. The power of God was often so strong the demon

possessed couldn't enter without being delivered. Sometimes when just passing the church they'd fall down and be delivered without anybody praying for them. One Sunday morning, government soldiers burst into our meeting and locked all the doors. They said they were looking for a criminal.

An officer shouted, No one is leaving until we find who we're looking for. They took us one by one into the basement to check our ID. In Ethiopia you can't live without your ID. Haile Selassie never cared about identity papers but the communists loved them. ID gave them great control over the people. It is a form of fear that kept the people ever conscious of those in authority. The present government makes everyone carry ID. On our ID is written the name of the tribe we come from. This is very dangerous. If those in power want to ethnically cleanse a certain tribe ID provides them with an ideal tool.

I was in my office while the communists were checking the people's ID. At one point I assumed the checking was over. I went up to the policeman who was standing watch over the main door. I said, It is finished. Let the people go. He instantly obeyed. He opened the door and we all left. One man who'd been arrested later told us the captain had been furious with the soldier who'd opened the door.

Where are the people? he screamed.

The pastor told me to let the people go.

Who gives the orders around here? Find that bloody pastor and we'll kill him.

I went elsewhere to an afternoon meeting unaware that most of our leaders had been jailed. I arrived home after a midnight cell group meeting. My wife and my children were wide awake. Hamalemale said the police had been waiting for me until one o'clock at night. We prayed, What are we going to do now Lord? Just then the police returned and arrested me. This was a dangerous situation. People taken in the middle of the night are rarely seen again. Often buried in unmarked graves or thrown over the cliffs in Addis, meat for the hungry hyenas.

I was taken to where my church people were jailed. They were not cooperating with the authorities. They said, If you want you can kill us. We have freedom in Christ. We belong to God. They had stripped their names and faces from their IDs. They told the communists, Our country is in heaven. Our government is the Kingdom of God. You have no power over us.

The communist leader grabbed me. He yelled, Did you teach them to talk like this?

I said, No Sir! Not me! The Bible says we should obey and respect the government as far as we can.

He calmed down. He said, You have to co-operate with us. When we want a criminal you shouldn't just open the doors and let him escape.

I said I was sorry. Said I hadn't realised there was a criminal in our meeting. Next day they released me home to my family.

Expelled American missionaries from the *Baptist Bible Fellowship* congregated in Kenya. These missionaries had ordained the part-time pastor working alongside me. Like many pastors employed by missionaries he was in full-time secular work and part-time church work. I was the one who'd shaped and structured that church. The revival broke out under my ministry. Yet these Baptists didn't like me because they couldn't control me. Neither did they like the moving of the Holy Spirit.

We invited them to come and experience the blessing for themselves. They came incognito. The church was jam-packed. I thought they'd glorify God for the outpouring of revival. But far from being happy at the amazing church growth in the midst of communist persecution they wrote us a letter. They said, We are very displeased you have changed our Baptist church into a Pentecostal church. These are not our people. These people are not Baptists. These people are strangers. They must leave. We want our building back.

Unlike Peter at Cornelius' house, who recognised the new move of God among the Gentiles, they refused to work with anything that didn't fit with their particular theology. Their letter disturbed us. We began to pray and fast. One of us saw a vision in which an angel came from Mengistu's office. (Mengistu Haile Mariam was the communist Ethiopian dictator who between 1975 and 1978 was responsible for the 7th worst genocide in World History. He was called *The Butcher of Addis*.) The angel was carrying a large sword. He planted this sword right in front of our church.

We prayed about this vision. We wondered, What does this mean? One day, unknown to us, journalists came and took pictures of the demon possessed being

delivered. In Ethiopia we say, *Oau Oau Ta*. This means, Yelling and screaming in the city. One newspaper reporter wrote, How can we run a communist revolution when these Christians are causing *Oau Oau Ta* right in the middle of Addis Ababa? We communists say there is no God and no spirits but these church people are casting out spirits and healing people. We must put a stop to this. Next day the army came, shut us down and confiscated our property. Disunity had afforded Satan an open door to break up the work of the Lord.

The communists interrogated me. They said, Kebede forget all about this church business. It's no use. Why don't you work for us as a school director? They offered my staff alternative work. Some took up this offer. My former secretary is still a government worker. The elders of the church agreed with the communists. They said, Kebede, go and join the government. Take their work or maybe you can get a job in World Vision. (World Vision is a social NGO.) Forget the church at this time. Take easier work. Don't worry, they said. Even though the members are scattered, God will keep them safe.

I prayed, Lord what am I going to do? Should I leave the flock and take an ordinary job? The Lord reminded me it's the hireling that deserts the sheep.

The good shepherd stays with them. I told the elders, No, I won't leave the people and take a secular job. I will organise the people into an underground church. The church still exists though the building is gone.

We met in cell groups each with a name and a code number. I regularly wrote a Bible study paper called *Amola* in Amharic. In Ethiopia there is a large block of salt given to cows called *Amola*. The text of this Bible study was taken from 1st & 2nd Peter when all the saints were scattered. The intention was, We must lick the salty word of God for strength and survival in our time of persecution.

People tithed, prayed and met together. We elders met in various secret locations; a coffee shop here, a tea shop there. These were the days of cat and mouse. I'd park my car and dodge through alleyways and back streets to get to cell meetings. Life was tough. We felt watched all the time. Anyone could be a Judas. That quiet man in the corner reading the newspaper could be a police informer. That smiling young girl serving coffee might be a communist agent. The age of innocence was dead. We could trust no one.

Yet the Lord brought encouragement. In 1983 Reinhard Bonnke held a *Fire Conference* in Harare,

Zimbabwe. He said the Lord had shown him that from the tip of South Africa to the tip at Cairo a fire in the Spirit was burning. God told him to bring African Christian leaders together and to pray for them to be anointed by the Holy Spirit in order to take this revival fire all over Africa. Bonke offered to pay for some of us Ethiopian leaders to attend.

The communists didn't like the idea of Christians leaving Ethiopia. They were afraid we'd give bad reports about them to the Western world. After much prayer and striving I managed to obtain a visa to travel to the *Fire Conference*. Finally a group of us were seated on the aeroplane about to leave for Harare. At the last minute secret police came and took us to prison.

We were interrogated for four days. They said, Why are you going to Harare? What kind of meetings are these? Are you going to speak evil about communism? We were taken to a higher official in emigration. He warned us not to give any press releases. He said, You'd better keep quiet. Our secret agents will follow you. We'll be watching you at all times. We'll know your every move. Think of your wives and children. You may attend these meetings but keep quiet and make sure you come back. Those interrogation sessions unnerved me. It's scary to

realise you can be taken from an aeroplane and so easily imprisoned or killed. It's frightening to think one's wife and children can so quickly be made fatherless. Communism like all godless ideologies works on fear. Like Herod and Pilate with Jesus they think they have the power of life and death. Eventually we arrived at Bonnke's meetings in Harare. The anointing of the Holy Spirit on Reinhard Bonnke was so fresh and strong.

We were put into the luxurious Sheraton Hotel. We'd gone from a filthy prison to a palace in a day. Those were exciting times. Bonnke's face was glowing like the face of Moses. You could physically see the effects of the anointing on him. He was a great strength to us. Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland were at those meetings. Benson Idahosa was also there. In those days Benny Hinn was not well known. He wasn't even teaching a seminar. Kenneth Copeland was moving powerfully in words of knowledge. Benson Idahosa was a main speaker. The meetings lasted six days. It was such a powerful time of encouragement for us. These were special days of visitation when our hands and faith were strengthened. Heaven upon earth. Some of our leaders never returned to Ethiopia after that conference. They couldn't face the constant struggle anymore. I came back home to Ethiopia mightily inspired but even so cracks were beginning to appear.

6.

Nigerian Days

A day came when I couldn't stand the pressure any longer. Living under the daily threat of imprisonment and death took its toll. I think it might be easier to be imprisoned full-time rather than suffer the constant uncertainty of being caught and killed. Outside the church the communists were constantly harassing and spying on me. Inside the church the Baptist missionaries were also constantly harassing and spying on me.

They were still causing trouble even though the church building was now officially closed. They argued over doctrine. We weren't allowed just to be Christians. They forced us into categories. I'm a Baptist. You're a Pentecostal. We don't believe this. You don't believe that. They caused discord. In the end the white missionaries did what the red communists couldn't do. They smashed the church.

I felt crushed between the communists and the missionaries. There was bad news daily. Friends and former colleagues disappeared. Some turned up dead. Most were never found. I regularly prayed with the Lutheran priest, Gudina Tumsa, until he was executed. They even killed the Orthodox Pope. Many of my friends like Abuna Tewophilos died in prison.

Our children were also getting older. Soon the communists would be knocking on our door to take them off for military training. We'd heard awful reports of raw recruits being put into the minefields of Eritrea. It was cheaper than losing a tank. I was risking my life and my family under communism while at the same time church leaders who could have been supportive were at loggerheads with one another. Discord and confusion reigned.

I was also doing a degree in sociology and psychology. With the church confiscated I'd enrolled as a part-time student. The communists assumed I'd abandoned Christianity and was being re-educated. Church people had also influenced my decision to study. Some complained I'd only learned theology and was not well read. They challenged me to study psychology, counselling, Marxism and Leninism so I could be considered educated and not just a stupid Pente.

I succumbed. I wanted to prove I was also an academic. With hindsight I know this was a total waste of time. Had I invested as much time and effort into praying and seeking the Lord I believe I'd be far more advanced in my spiritual life. So much education is just head knowledge. Withered leaves from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Academics and intellectuals don't bother atheistic communism. Communists fear people who hear from God. Satan and his underlings dread those who truly know God.

After much prayer and soul searching I sensed the Lord telling me to leave. My Ethiopian days were over. I didn't feel I was abandoning my sheep. I hadn't run the moment the church was confiscated by the communists. I'd stayed for seven years and

organised an underground church. Now we had over twenty mature leaders that I'd personally trained. I knew the church would survive when I left. I also realised my strong Pentecostal leanings might eventually cause a division with the church splitting it into Baptist and Pentecostal camps. There had been enough scatterings by the communists. I'd laboured over eleven years amongst this flock in the most difficult of circumstances. I didn't want a split.

I planned my escape. When I'd been a pastor in the Mulu Wongel I'd gone to *The Haggai Institute* in Singapore for advanced Christian leadership training. So I applied for another course at The Haggai and was accepted. A friend in immigration arranged a visa. The stage was set for my escape. The plan was to attend *The Haggai Institute* and not return from Singapore.

Only the church leadership and my wife knew. Hamalemale agreed with my decision. She said, My husband, go out and maybe the Lord will help us and we can all be gathered together again in a better place. We can make any sacrifice that is necessary. Remember God supported us when you were an evangelist living daily by faith. He supported us when you were in Bible School. He will not desert us now.

So go out and God be with you. She and our children
kissed me and said goodbye.

I went into my life as a refugee with little else than my
old worn Bible, which says in Leviticus 19,

When an alien lives with you in your
land, do not mistreat him. The alien
living with you must be treated as one of
your native-born. Love him as yourself,
for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the
Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 10 speaking about God and refugees
says,

He defends the cause of the fatherless
and the widow, and loves the alien,
giving him food and clothing. And you
are to love those who are aliens, for
you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

Throughout scripture God constantly warns us to be
sensitive to the many miseries of the refugee. I was
soon to learn why. Singapore didn't want refugees.
They only allowed their own people to have two

children. I contacted the United Nations and they accepted my case as legitimate. They found me a hostel and gave me a small amount of money. There was not enough to rent a room of one's own.

In my hostel dormitory there were two-dozen beds occupied by all sorts of people, mainly tourists and backpackers. Many were sleeping with each other; homosexuals, lesbians and straight people. It was like Sodom and Gomorrah. They fought in their beds, made love in their beds, got drunk in their beds, took drugs in their beds and smoked in their beds. Some even slept in their beds. The place reeked of marijuana. I continually prayed and read my Bible. They laughed at me. I was the only black person there. I'd a short wave radio that brought some respite. I managed to tune in to some Christian programmes and international news.

I had to phone home at a late hour. Night-time in Singapore is scary. In the streets people were partying; loud music, drinking, drugs and open sex. Prostitutes prowling around like lions. One made advances making sexual noises. I said, Stay away in Jesus' name. When I said, In Jesus' name, she went berserk and attacked me. Like Joseph with Potiphar's wife I was soon out of there.

Then my visa expired making me an illegal immigrant. The United Nations people gave me money to go to Malaysia by bus. They said when I'd come back Singapore immigration would give me another three months visa. They hoped these extra three months would give them time to relocate me in another country. I was arrested at the Malaysian border and jailed.

Malaysian officials decided to send me back to Ethiopia. If this happened I knew I'd definitely be shot. I was really scared. I prayed, Lord is this the end? Suddenly I realised I'd the telephone number of the United Nations on a piece of paper in my pocket. After a while an Indian man passed by my cell window. I called to him, Please could you call the United Nations and tell them this Ethiopian man is in trouble. The stranger took the piece of paper and disappeared.

Next day the United Nations people came and rescued me. Had it not been for that Indian man's act of kindness I'd have been deported and murdered, just another nameless Ethiopian sacrificed upon the altar of atheistic communism. A United Nations worker immediately put me on an aeroplane for Nigeria. He said I'd be met by a UN representative at the airport but no one turned up. I waited at the airport for three

days until a policeman helped me. He called a taxi and told the driver to take me to the United Nations Headquarters. The policeman told the driver he would be paid by the UN people. The taxi driver appeared lost as we drove around Lagos for hours. Then just before office closing time he mysteriously found the headquarters. The UN worker just laughed at the taxi driver's huge bill. He gave him a fraction of it and told him to behave himself in future.

I was put into a guesthouse in a densely populated area called Ishaga. This was on Friday. On Sunday I wanted to attend church. Nigeria is a very confused country. I am honestly not trying to belittle an African country but Nigeria just takes your breath away. It is truly unbelievable! Someone might be having an open air Christian outreach. Nearby a magician is carrying a snake on his head and doing magic. On a bus a person stands up and claims to be an evangelist. He preaches a short message, takes an offering and disappears. Another person appears and claims he has love potions ten times stronger than Viagra. He sells some and evaporates at the next stop.

On Sunday morning I was so depressed I stayed in my room. Around three o'clock I went for a jog. On my run I passed a house where Christians were singing. I could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. I stopped

and asked, What kind of a church is this? They said, We are a Christian Pentecostal church. Our pastor is an Ethiopian. It turned out I'd taught the pastor when he was a student in our Bible School. He'd changed his name from Selishe to Dan. He was a young boy when I last saw him. Now he was a big strapping fellow pastoring a middle class church and driving a Mercedes. He'd a Ghanaian wife and children. I was amazed.

He welcomed me. He said, Pastor Kebede how did you come here? I joined them in the meeting in my jogging gear. He introduced me to his wife and children. Then he left me back to the hostel. In Ethiopia we'd have gladly welcomed fellow believers into our homes when they were in distress but this brother had changed. Now he was a successful pastor and I was a poor refugee. He had forgotten the things he'd learned in his youth.

Still he gave me a job teaching in the Bible School and occasionally he'd let me preach in church. I now had a room of my own and was getting a little money from this church. I constantly thought of how to bring my wife and children to be with me. I hadn't seen them in one and a half years. I missed them all so much but there was no easy way to get them out from Ethiopia. We'd have to be very careful.

My first son, Bareket, was seventeen years old and registered as a student. Through connections we managed to get him a visa to study in Nigeria. Hamalemale was allowed to accompany him in order to settle him in at university. Our other two children, Sarah and Nardos remained with relatives in Ethiopia.

When Hamalemale saw me she burst into tears. I'd lost so much weight. She said I looked thin and bald like an old man. The United Nations office wouldn't let the three of us live together. Bareket had to go to another camp. We continually prayed about being reunited. Lagos is a terrible place. You might own a car and one day someone will come with a gun and take the car and you'll never see it again. The whole place was full of bandits and robbers. They can make you a passport from anywhere in the world. They can counterfeit money from anywhere in the world. They are excellent forgers and scammers. Nigerians are an amazing people. They can eat anything. One day I'd been preaching at a certain church. As we left a big fat rat ran from under the building.

The Nigerian pastor shouted, Catch that rat for me.

The whole congregation chased it and killed it. The pastor opened the boot of his car, popped the rat in beside his briefcase and said, God has supplied my

daily bread. He took me home for lunch and seemed surprised when I didn't eat my portion of meat.

My small wireless got broken. I'd saved up fifty US dollars and went to Lagos' Oshodi market for a replacement. Two policemen noticed me. In most countries people feel safe talking to a policeman. Not so in Nigeria.

One policeman asked, Where are you from?

I'm an African.

You're a cheeky African. What country are you from?

Ethiopia.

A proud Ethiopian. Have you come to steal our jobs?

The timing was bad for me. Only days before there'd been a big fight between an Ethiopian and a Nigerian soccer player. Everyone was talking about it. The Ethiopian came out best in that encounter but not so

this time. They bundled me into their car, drove me to a forest, robbed me and beat me unconscious.

When I came around I'd no strength. I just lay there a long time unable to move. I prayed, Lord, why have all these bad things happened to me? I thought of the evil of communism, the divisions within the church, my family separated. Now I was lost and beaten in a strange forest. I thought of Paul's words. He said, We even despaired of life. I also remembered the scripture, Those who live the Christian life will suffer persecution. Eventually my strength returned and I was able to hobble back to the refugee camp.

Nigerians have little respect for law and order. They say traffic lights are just for decoration. They brought out a law that said you could only drive cars with number plates ending in an odd number on one day and cars with number plates ending in even numbers the next day. This meant you couldn't drive two days in a row in the same car. But the Nigerians made number plates that could easily be changed from day to day. When I was there I read that over one million people had been killed in traffic accidents.

I asked a Nigerian, What do you think of this awful statistic?

He said, Don't worry. There are plenty more of us.

Many Nigerians have a lot of children and some have two or three wives. They love to display their wealth by throwing big parties. They invite all their friends and have a big shindig right in the middle of the street, drinking and dancing the night away. They love these displays of wealth. The main man will bring his wives and put them in a room and display them with all his possessions.

Double standards abound. Many Nigerian Christians go to the church on Sunday morning and then to the witch doctor in the afternoon. One police commissioner told me he was a committed Christian yet at the same time he was a practising freemason. Many Nigerians are caught up in freemasonry. They love the power and the influence it brings. I personally thought Nigeria was a hard place for a refugee. Guns everywhere.

I am an intercessor. I only ever sleep for a few hours. Since I've become a believer I always wake up in the middle of every night and pray. It's part of my calling. One particular night in the refugee camp the Holy Spirit inspired me to pray. That morning I had to go and meet someone. I left the camp speaking in tongues. Suddenly I turned a corner and came face-

to-face with a woman. When she saw me she screamed and fell down as if dead. A crowd gathered to see what'd happened. I started to witness. I said, The power of God has come upon this woman to deliver her from a demon. I preached the gospel of Christ to them. All this time she lay motionless. Then I prayed for her and she was instantly released. The demon left and she went on her way as free as a bird.

In Nigeria they practise Ju Ju. Quick as a flash they can cast a demon onto you. Even some church people will do anything to get more money, sex or power. Many are into syncretism. They mix Christianity with freemasonry, Ju Ju, incantation and New-Age. There is a certain Nigerian preacher called Emmanuel. He said, I am the bread of life. He built a large statue of himself and people started to worship it. He has more than a hundred churches. He became famous and wealthy. He had his own police force and his own bodyguards. He lives like a king. He works signs and wonders by the power of demons.

I am a black Jesus, he says. I am the Jesus of Nigeria.

I often passed by his church but I'd never go onto his compound. Nigeria is a dog-eat-dog society. Sometimes a convoy of police vehicles will arrive in a

village and cordon off the whole area. Then the police will search from house to house. Then they quickly dissolve back into the lorries and speed off. It's only then the people realise they were robbed by bandits. Even relatives steal from one another. For this reason a company owner will usually employ his own relatives. He thinks it better to have his family stealing from him than complete strangers. They say, You steal and I steal. You eat and I eat. You die and I die.

But Nigeria also has some remarkable Christians. Benson Idahosa was a very powerful Nigerian Christian leader. I knew him from my Bible School days. I was at a world Pentecostal gathering of 2,000 leaders in Nairobi. At the end of the meeting the organisers said they were \$50,000 short on the conference expenses. They asked the people to contribute generously. The offering only amounted to \$5,000. They told the people, We are now only \$45,000 short. Let us pray.

At this point Benson Idahosa walked up to the microphone and took the offering basket into his hands. He stared into the crowd. They became quiet as mice. He said, This is a crippled gift. It stinks before the Lord. If Jesus came back now your money would be a heap of an ash. There are people

here who can easily write a check for \$50,000. Why are you being so miserable? The Lord wants to prosper you but you need to plant a seed.

He turned and said, There is a lady here who can give \$20,000. Could she please stand?

I was surprised when a woman stood and wrote a cheque for \$20,000.

Another man has \$20,000 to donate. Stand up, he said. The man stood up.

Another man has \$10,000 he said. This man stood up.

Benson Idahosa raised \$50,000 from three people within a couple of minutes and then sat down. There was such a strong authority on him. I'd heard the testimony of how the Lord gave Benson the nation of Ghana as an inheritance. It's inspiring. Benson was invited to preach in Ghana, which was under military dictatorship at the time. At the airport as soon as Benson's foot touched the ground the Lord said to him, I'm going to give you this land as an inheritance.

En route to his hotel there was an accident. A workman fell off a scaffold on a high-rise building and was instantly killed. His body was broken and his head was cracked open with his brains spilled out on the pavement. As Benson's taxi slowed to pass the scene of the accident the ambulance crew and newspapermen were already there. The Lord told Benson to stop the taxi and to pray for the dead man.

Benson struggled with this instruction. He said, Lord this man is dead and his skull is smashed open. What can I do?

The Lord said, Do what you are told and do it quickly.

Benson stopped the taxi but when he neared the accident and saw the full extent of the injuries he was so shocked he couldn't even pray. He just screamed the name of Jesus at the top of his voice. At the first scream the skull and brains of the man immediately came together and closed up. Benson's faith soared. He proclaimed to the corpse, In the mighty name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk.

Instantly the man opened his eyes, got up and started asking what had happened to him. Cameras were flashing and reporters were taking notes.

The workman was taken to hospital where the doctors said they couldn't tell whether the man had fallen or not. There were no signs of cuts or bruises or broken bones. He was in perfect health.

Next day the front pages of the national newspaper were emblazoned with photographs of Benson and the workman and vivid details of the miracle. Everyone was talking. News reached the head of the military government. Benson was called to the palace. The President told Benson, You're welcome to Ghana. Whatever you do and wherever you go the government of Ghana will support you. We will give you buildings and stadiums for your meetings and support you in any way we can.

Within a few hours the Lord had made good on his promise to Benson. He truly gave him the land of Ghana for within a couple of years Benson had over a thousand churches there. God can give us within a few minutes of faith and obedience that which we could never attain with a lifetime's striving in our own strength. Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.

Another time I saw Benson in Zimbabwe at a Fire Conference. He told us, You Ethiopians have to pray. He read from Psalm 149.

May the praise of God be in their mouths
and a double-edged sword in their hands,
to inflict vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
to bind their kings with fetters,
their nobles with shackles of iron,
to carry out the sentence written against them.
This is the glory of all his saints.

He told us prayer could change the government of our country. He said Nigeria had almost fallen to the deception of communism. People thought the communist government would give everyone a fair standard of living. The television, newspapers, billboards, rallies etc. were promoting communism all the time. Benson said the Christians began to pray against this spirit of communism.

One day a member of Benson's Church came to him and said, Pastor, why are we sitting here and just praying. Why don't you buy airtime on television like the communists are doing? Instead of their doctrine of demons you could preach the truth of the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Why should we keep quiet when daily they spread their lies?

Benson went to the television station and met the head of programming. She said, Can I help you pastor?

Benson said, Lady, I need a daily television program on your station. Just as the communists preach about Marx I want to preach about Christ.

The lady got angry. She said, We communists are going to bring an economic and social change to this corrupt country. You want to preach Christianity, the ideology of capitalism. You want to dilute our work. I will never give you space on my television station. It'd be better for me to give it to the devil than to you!

Benson left the television studios with a heavy heart. As he stepped into his car the Lord said, Don't worry Benson, I'll give you the programme. Just pray.

Benson prayed. The Lord told him to go back to the lady and prophesy she would soon leave her job in disgrace and Benson would then get the air time he asked for.

The lady laughed Benson out of the studios when he prophesied this. Benson went home and mobilised his church to pray. Within weeks this lady's name and picture were on the front page of the morning newspaper. She'd been caught embezzling funds from the television company. She left in disgrace just as the Lord had said.

Benson returned to the television studios. He asked to see the new head of programming. He was shown into the same office as before. Sitting before him was a Christian woman Benson knew well.

She said, How can I help you pastor?

Benson told her the full story. He said, We are the people who prayed that communist woman out of this job. He explained he wanted a slot to preach the gospel. The lady said, Sure! No problem. This is a democratic country. Christians can speak about Christianity. Marxists can speak about Marxism. Here is a contract. Sign the paper. Have the program.

Benson began his daily program and it went from strength to strength. Soon the hearts and minds of the people turned away from communism and the whole work of communism was diluted just as the first

woman feared it would be. Benson told us, If you pray and obey you can change the ungodly system of your country.

I have learnt this important message from this great man of God. Benson was a giant before the Lord. When you meet the strong men of God they often appear proud and arrogant for they speak boldly. You can easily misjudge their Godly confidence for arrogance. I think it's the anointing and the authority from God that makes them so bold.

7.

O Canada!

After three years in Nigeria, Canada offered us asylum. God bless those who work on behalf of refugees. Hamalemale, Bareket and I were housed in a motel in Surrey, Vancouver. Our other children Sarah and Nardos were still back in Ethiopia under communism. The moment our feet touched Canadian earth the Lord gave us grace. Seemed like we'd finally entered the Promised Land. During the first few days on the King George Highway I noticed a sign that said, *Prayer Canada*. I thought I should join with these praying people.

At *Prayer Canada* I met Arnie Bryant, a seasoned prayer warrior, who has been an enormous blessing to me over the years. Arnie and his colleagues opened their hearts to me as we prayed together. Over lunch they told me of a church called *Victory Christian Centre*. At this church we met an Ethiopian woman who warmly welcomed us. The pastor introduced us to the congregation. He said, Pastor Kebede's family are Ethiopia refugees. Can anyone help them out with a car? One man gave us a Buick automatic. We'd only been one week in Canada.

As refugees we received a weekly allowance until we found work. I drove to the immigration office in my new car to collect this weekly cheque. The immigration lady was shocked. She said? That is a very good car. How did you get it? Immigrants who've been working here for years can't afford such a car.

She said, Are you cheating the Canadian government? If you're rich enough to live off your own money you're not entitled to any help from us.

I said, I didn't buy this car. The church gave it to me. I am a Christian pastor.

She said, You better bring a letter from the church proving what you say is true.

I regularly met with Arnie Bryant at *Prayer Canada*. We prayed and Bareket found a job as an electrician for twenty dollars an hour. We couldn't believe it. I asked Arnie to pray about my future. He said there was a PAOC church, *Pentecostal Assemblies Of Canada*, nearby in British Columbia. He made an appointment for me to meet with Lester Markham, the superintendent. I told Lester my story. I said, I'd like to join a good Pentecostal church and serve the Lord. Lester told me about the *Broadway Tabernacle* church and its forward thinking pastor Alan Hornby.

I met Alan and instantly liked him. He was a visionary with a heart to create a multicultural church that honestly reflected the international mix of Canadian society. A PAOC study showed 60% of the high school population of Vancouver were of international origin. Alan believed the future was multicultural. He wanted Broadway's church programs and outreaches to include all ethnic groups. His vision strongly resonated with me because the New Testament Church was not just a single ethnic group. As Paul told the foolish Galatians, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all

one in Christ Jesus. God is no respecter of persons. God is not a racist. He has always intended his church to be multicultural. It was he who made all races in his own image. Single identity churches are just another expression of institutional racism.

I found favour with Alan. He employed me as a pastor on *The Broadway Tabernacle* staff. There were nine other pastors in the two thousand member church. This all happened within three months of our arrival into Canada. Now we were totally off all government support. I was teaching, preaching and praying and Hamalemale and Bareket were working.

I began to have a burden for other refugees. Alan encouraged me to start a church in Surrey. Because I'd been a refugee I was able to empathise. I worked closely with the church and the immigration board of Canada in settling exiles from Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya. The church people befriended them, helped them integrate and find jobs. Those who got work seeded back into the church through tithes and offerings. The church people were excellent at hospitality. For a refugee to be welcomed into a host person's home is so important. So many Ethiopians are now good established Canadian citizens because of that work.

Broadway supported us and helped by supplying a bus and driver to ferry the people to and from church each Sunday. They arranged Refugee Retreats. They also broadcast my preaching in Amharic on the radio. Broadway also helped bring Sarah and Nardos to Canada. There were two PAOC missionaries in Nairobi, Maurice and Geraldine. Alan Hornby and Joan Barage enlisted their help. I'm eternally grateful to Joan for her tireless work on our behalf, telephoning at all hours and monitoring the situation from afar. The children were taken into Kenya to stay with Maurice and Geraldine for a month and then smuggled out of Nairobi to Canada.

I hadn't seen my two youngest children for four years. When they arrived in Canada we were full of joy and broken in tears. We wept and laughed for such a long time. There'd been so many years of sorrow. Now the floodgates of joy were opened. It was a wonderful time. Days of heaven upon earth. Things were great for us spiritually and practically. We were finally at peace. Hamalemale, Bareket and I were working and Sarah and Nardos were in High School.

Four good years later our joy was complete when we were granted Canadian citizenship. After many years of cruel separation and persecution our future looked rosy in our land of milk and honey. Then my faith

was tested. Alan Hornby's vision of a multicultural church necessitated we demolish the present structure and erect a bigger building that could accommodate many groups: Chinese, Filipino, Spanish, African and so on. Alan wanted a debt-free church so we could put money into missions instead of paying interest to banks. We'd prayed and fasted. We'd organised a huge banquet. We raised money and the building work was progressing nicely.

Then it was discovered Alan, who was only fifty-five, had colon cancer. He asked me to pray for him. They operated and discovered the cancer had spread into his lungs and liver. The doctor said he wouldn't survive. I prayed with Alan for a year and a half. We held all-night prayer vigils. I organised a prayer chain. Alan used to say, I hope God will keep me alive until this work is finished.

Like Moses he wanted to take his people into a new territory. He was a great friend to me. His wife Judy was such an anointed piano player. Up to the very last minute I remained in faith but Alan never got healed. Yet I learned from Alan's situation it's better to die in faith than in despair. Like the heroes in Hebrews 11, Alan died in faith not accepting death. For Alan, like Jesus, death was still the last enemy to be defeated. Alan was a spiritual father to me. He blessed and

accepted me so much. I will never forget him. I thank God for him. He was a genuine man of God with a true vision.

Some people attacked my prayer life. They said, This African has come here speaking about healing and prayer yet he couldn't save his friend Alan Hornby. What use is all his talk about prayer? I felt I did the right thing. At least I made Alan's remaining time comfortable. Alan preached until the very last week of his life. He died in harness pulling the King's carriage. They made a special chair so he could sit behind the pulpit. I've never seen as strong a spirited man as Alan. He strengthened the church while he himself was dying. He really loved the people of God.

Another attack came upon the heels of Alan's death. I was invited to preach in America. When I phoned home, Bareket said, Mom has a terrible headache. She's had to see a doctor. I flew home immediately. The scan showed she'd a fast growing brain tumour. They said, Soon her balance will be affected. After three months she'll be bedridden. Within six months she'll die. The bottom fell out of our world.

I prayed and fasted continuously against this brain tumour. I lost so much weight. To me it seemed the

more I prayed and fasted the more Hamalemale suffered. It's a hard thing to see your beloved suffering and you not able to help. It's the worst kind of torture. God never changed the situation but he changed my prayer. I said, Lord I can't bear to see my wife who's stood beside me in my life and ministry these past twenty-seven years suffer any more. She is a faithful woman. Please relieve her suffering, Lord. Either heal her or take her home.

The Lord took her home. Although I believe strongly in healing I also realise there are times when we must bow to the sovereignty of God. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. He knows the end from the beginning. His kingdom must come upon the earth. The people at Broadway Church were a great support throughout these dark days. Yet Hamalemale's death devastated our whole family in a way, which still affects us to this day. She was the mainstay in our family over the years. She was the one who held us all together in her big Ethiopian heart. We fragmented after her death.

Church people tried to comfort me. Ethiopian pastors from all over North America laid hands on me at their yearly conference. I remained depressed. Everything was black and hopeless. I couldn't pray. I couldn't read my Bible. When people talked I couldn't listen.

I had conflicting emotions. Sometimes I was so angry I thought I was going to lose my faith.

Then the Lord spoke. He said, Kebede, why are you still holding on to your wife? I have taken her. She's in my hand. Don't I have a right to take my handmaiden home? Why are you angry with me?

I said, Lord, what about me? What about my family? What about my ministry? What's going to happen to me?

The Lord said, You are mine. Your wife is mine. Your family is mine. Your ministry is mine. You have nothing in this world that I didn't give you.

Suddenly I saw things clearly. I said, Thank you Lord. You are God. When I said this immediately a great weight just lifted off my head and shoulders. I was able to accept the situation. I was released and my peace was restored. I began to say, Thank you Lord! Thank you Lord!

A scripture came to me, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. This scripture burned itself

into me and blew my heart wide open. I knew the best was yet to be.

Afterwards Ethiopian women began calling me. Some said they were available for marriage. One lady persisted day and night. A single pastoral worker in Broadway also indicated her interest. A few pastors tried to help by recommending this one and that one. One lady doctor even made advances. Yet none of these situations moved me. The Lord's words kept ringing in my ears, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. I knew God had prepared someone for me and I was willing to wait for his best.

I was invited to a prayer meeting at Bellingham Christian Camp; an all male affair. Well-known Canadian leaders like Bob Birch, David Damien and Gideon Chu were there. In Ethiopia we'll normally pray and fast at the same time. In North America we tend to pray and feast at the same time. Food is a central part of North American Christianity. I often think if food and electricity disappeared most of the North American church couldn't function. Regularly in Ethiopia we have neither food nor electricity. But thank God we have hungry people charged up for God.

At this Bellingham camp I decided to fast and pray. During lunch I slipped into the Prayer Chapel and was interceding with my eyes closed when I suddenly heard a woman's voice speaking in tongues. I opened my eyes but could see no one. Perhaps she was round the corner. I kept silent. Next day I again slipped away to the Chapel during lunch. Again I heard a woman's voice praying in tongues. I said, Lord who is this one woman amongst all these men? Why is she praying here? What kind of a woman is she?

The Lord said, This is the one I told you about. Remember I said, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. This woman is going to be your wife.

I started to laugh and laugh and laugh inside. Great joy filled my heart. I walked around the corner to where she was sitting and tapped her on the shoulder.

I said, What is your name?

She said, Ruth.

I'm Kebede. May I speak with you? Let's walk around the lake.

As we strolled I told her my story. I said my wife is dead. I said, The Lord just told me a few minutes ago you're going to be my wife. Ruth moved away, shocked at my words. This was the last thing she expected. Gideon Chu was her pastor. She said she'd talk to him about this.

Next day I was invited to have lunch with Ruth, Gideon Cho and other pastors. They interviewed me and we agreed we should all pray to hear God's will on this matter. Ruth was home on furlough from Uganda where she'd been working with the *African Children's Choir*. Within a month she had to go back to Uganda. For three weeks of this month I was in my Toronto office working on a PAOC programme concerning Ethiopian churches joining the Pentecostal Assemblies Of Canada. We only met a few times. She came to my church. I went to her church.

Then Ruth returned to Uganda. Our courtship was carried on by telephone and letter. After six months she returned to Canada and told her parents she was going to marry me. They weren't overjoyed. There was a godly old woman in her eighties by the name of Sister Cobb. Ruth lived with Sister Cobb when home

from the mission field. She was Ruth's spiritual mentor. Sister Cobb invited me to a lunch and an interrogation. She asked, When were you saved? How were you saved? How many years have you served the Lord? What has God said to you?

Before she became a committed Christian Ruth had been married and divorced without children. Ruth had been many years in the mission field before she met me. Her father contacted the Broadway Church, Who is this Kebede? Is he a good man or a bad man? Is he honest or a liar? Even though Broadway Church because of theological reasons were against me marrying a divorced woman they still had positive things to say. They said I was a good and honest man of God.

PAOC made it crystal clear if I married Ruth I'd lose my credentials and my position within the church. I'd have to leave the ministry. This was to be the cost of following God's will and marrying Ruth. Some pastors said, Kebede do whatever the Lord tells you to do. These are just man-made rules. We have been debating these divorce regulations for years in our general assembly. In cases like yours and Ruth's where she was divorced before she became a Christian of course there should be an exception. Perhaps had Alan Hornby been alive we might have received some

grace but as it was the powers that be closed ranks and wouldn't budge.

I chose to marry Ruth and follow God's will even though it cost me my livelihood and ministry. I was humiliated and excommunicated. No one tried to help. Alan was gone. Hamalemale was gone. My ministry was gone. My family were hurting. But God's promise was still there.

Breaking through the dark clouds of confusion were his words, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. I chose to believe.

8.

Back To The Battle

After our marriage I was separated from Pentecostal Assemblies Of Canada. We sat in the congregation of *The Church Of Zion* for almost one year. We lived on unemployment benefit. Our first big struggle was over the area of calling and placement. I'd no intention of going back to the mission field especially to Africa. I was more than happy to stay in Canada. We'd never discussed these things before our marriage. Ruth just assumed we'd go back to Africa.

Ruth is a woman of faith and prayer, very prophetic and also an evangelist. Like a butterfly she doesn't like to sit in one place for too long. She is always out and about doing the Lord's work.

Attending the *Church of Zion* was a struggle for me. After leaving Broadway I said to Ruth, We should pray together and perhaps find another church. Just because *Church of Zion* was your church doesn't mean it's where we should go now we're married. Let us pray in unity and seek God's will. But Ruth insisted *Zion* was the church for us. Broadway had been a formal church. Everything was well organised with no surprises. Everyone knew what to expect. *Church of Zion* was different. They believed in body ministry with no set preacher. It was just like a believers' meeting from 1 Corinthians 14. Someone would stand and read a scripture. Another would sing a song. Someone would give a testimony. Another would pray. This was a new spiritual dynamic for me, difficult to adjust to.

Ruth was totally at home with it all. All her friends were there. She felt secure but my world was upside down. A year after our marriage some people from Vancouver went to the *Toronto Airport Church* and came back with testimonies of how the Lord was working in this Toronto Blessing.

Ruth became excited. She wanted to go and experience this blessing.

I was not convinced. I said, God can bless us here in Vancouver.

But during my prayer time the Lord corrected my attitude when I read the scripture that says, The Queen of Sheba went to Jerusalem to look for the Wisdom of Solomon. God challenged my pride? He said, Why don't you go and see what I'm doing in Toronto? So I changed my mind. We went to Toronto.

In the first meeting Pastor John Arnott gave an altar call. He said, Will those pastors here for the first time please come forward. We would like to pray for them. I was hesitant. Before I went to Toronto I wasn't sure about the phenomenon of being slain in the Spirit. From a pastoral prospective I wasn't convinced of its validity or benefits. As far as I could see the people who fell down in the Spirit just got up unchanged. I thought, Surely there must be a big transformation if the Holy Spirit knocks you down similar to what happened to Paul on the Damascus road.

So when John Arnott made this altar call I grudgingly went forward and placed my feet very firmly on the ground. I had no intention of being pushed over in the Spirit. But when John Arnott laid his hands on me immediately all power left my body and I fell to the ground. My body started shaking uncontrollably. I was totally flattened by the power of God. I could neither stop shaking nor stand up.

I prayed, Lord, what is this shaking?

God said, I am shaking off all your burdens and cares.

I was still very wounded. Even though I was remarried I still carried a deep sadness. I was still grieving over the loss of my wife and my position as a pastor in Broadway Church. My face was so gloomy. When I eventually managed to stand up my friend Wayne Stilling came over to me. Wayne is a prophet and a man gifted in Holy Laughter.

He laid his hand upon me and said, More Lord! He looked into my face and prayed in tongues. Suddenly the power of Holy Laughter gripped me. It was like being baptised in the Holy Spirit all over again. I couldn't stop this laughter. It just went on and on and on and on and on and on. I was laughing and

laughing and laughing and laughing. My stomach muscles became sore but I still couldn't stop it.

I asked, What's happening Lord?

He answered, I'm renewing your strength. I'm restoring your joy. I'm removing all sorrow. I'm anointing you with the oil of gladness. From this day forward you will laugh at all your circumstances. You will laugh at all your enemies. You will laugh in every situation.

Then I saw a vision in which I was in *Glad Tidings Mission Church* in Vancouver. In this vision I was packing my luggage for a long journey. The Ethiopian flag covered my suitcase. The voice of the Lord said, I am sending you back to Ethiopia. Ruth was overjoyed when I shared this vision. Next Sunday we went to *Church of Zion*, told them our story and said, We're going back to Ethiopia as missionaries. Immediately they pledged us one year's missionary support. Soon another church raised funds to buy a one-year open ticket to travel. Things moved quickly.

While at Broadway Church I was approached by some Ethiopians to register an Ethiopian Charity in Canada

and to become its Canadian director. This I did. I also helped raise funds for them. Soon after I received the call to return to Ethiopia I contacted these people. I suggested I might work with them. I hadn't been to Ethiopia for over ten years. These folk were the only contacts I had there. They said they'd meet me at the airport and help us settle in. When Ruth and I arrived in Addis Ababa there was no one waiting. They never showed up.

We had to stay in a hotel. When they saw our Canadian passports they charged us the top rate of \$80 per night. By God's grace we managed to find a room at the *Sudan Interior Mission* guesthouse in Addis. I thank God for this honest Christian organisation that gave us an affordable room at their inn. Times were difficult. The culture shock was terrible.

Pastors came to visit and told us to go back to Canada. They told us all the pastors who'd left during the communist Red Terror Days had never returned apart from short visits. The comfortable North American lifestyle spoils one from returning to the grinding poverty of Ethiopia. Just prior to our return a new government had been installed in turbulent times. There was trouble in the streets. The pastors warned us. They said, If robbers hear you are from Canada

they'll think you have money. Then your lives will be threatened.

Our tourist visa was only valid for three months. One night in prayer the Lord told me to register my own organisation. Before I'd initially left Ethiopia I'd belonged to an interdenominational movement called the *Holy Spirit Ministry*. When some of us realised the work of the Holy Spirit was not a denomination but an experience for all Christians we formed the *Holy Spirit Ministry*. Our idea was to visit different churches and pray for healing and baptism in the Holy Spirit. This ministry helped many Ethiopia churches to gain exposure to the works of the Holy Spirit.

There was no one left in Ethiopia from the original founders of the *Holy Spirit Ministry*. Many were dead or scattered. Some like myself were in the West as refugees. We'd hoped the *Holy Spirit Ministry* would go with us wherever we went. We'd talked about sending money back to Ethiopia to strengthen the *Holy Spirit Ministry* but we never did. When I became a refugee the *Holy Spirit Ministry* all but disintegrated and died. The dream was broken.

When we arrived in the West most of us *Holy Spirit Ministry* people forgot all about our hopes and promises and adapted instead to the persistent culture

around us. The fire went out. We were caught up in trying to survive. Improve our situation. Seduced by consumerism. When I came back to Ethiopia the Lord told me to rekindle the *Holy Spirit Ministry*. A true vision never dies. It'll always accomplish what it was sent for. God's word will not return to him void.

Back in Ethiopia former friends from the Baptist Church welcomed and invited me to speak at a big celebration. In those days I was still glowing with joy from my Toronto Blessing experience. At this reunion Ruth encouraged me to talk about the Toronto Blessing and the gift of Holy Laughter. I wasn't sure. I said, No, Ruth. I understand my own people. This thing might be too strange to them. Ruth said, Kebede don't be a chicken. The Lord has blessed you. Now you have to testify and transfer this blessing to others. I was reticent but she insisted. So I complied.

I preached about my Toronto Blessing experience of Holy Laughter. What a mistake! Next day I made the front page of the local newspaper. The article proclaimed, Kebede is cultic. He has come back with this spurious Holy Laughter from Toronto. Don't accept him. Have nothing to do with him. He is heretical.

After this, Ethiopian Christians dropped me like a hot potato. In one fell swoop I was cut off from all the churches. So when I restored the *Holy Spirit Ministry* many Christian leaders were unhappy with me. There is an Ethiopian group called *Evangelical Church Association*. This was started as an underground fellowship during the time of communism. I was one of the founders. Now it has grown into a huge controlling council with the power to stigmatise you and kill your ministry. When communism was our enemy we were friends in unity. When communism left the believers fought amongst themselves over power, privilege and position.

It's not easy to work with this *Evangelical Church Association*. You also have to pay a huge yearly fee otherwise they won't allow you to work in the country. Recently I gave in and joined them but I have problems with it all. I am writing a monthly prophetic paper called *Speak Out* in which I address various issues within the nation and the churches. This *Evangelical Church Association* has now excommunicated me from their company because they said I shouldn't write without their permission. They want to muzzle the prophets. Have they now become like the communists in preventing freedom of speech? Church politics are vicious.

I remembered back to when Mekru and I first returned from Bible School in Nairobi and started revival meetings in Addis Ababa. Many people were receiving deliverance from demons. These meetings were jam-packed. Some churches became jealous. Like the Pharisees with Jesus they became threatened by our growing popularity. They began to claim our teaching was unbiblical. Christians can't have a demon they said. They wrote a letter and distributed it all over the country. They started rumours claiming we were followers of Derek Prince and we were teaching people to sneeze, belch and vomit as a way of expelling demons. If this happened in a Western society you could sue them but in Ethiopia there is no recourse. You just have to take it on the chin.

One day I ran into the person who'd instigated the rumours. I grabbed his hand and said, Please tell me the truth. Have you seen anything in our ministry like the letter claims? Do we encourage the people to vomit, sneeze and so on? Please be honest.

He said, No, no, no, Kebede. You have a genuine ministry but the problem is you are attracting large crowds. Some people have left our church and are following you. In order to keep the people with us we had to give you a bad name. That was the purpose of the letter.

I said, Thank you for your honesty but how can you misuse church politics in order to control the people? It's not your responsibility to manipulate the people to stay. You're spoiling my name. You are assassinating my character.

When I innocently spoke about the Toronto Blessing it immediately gave them another opportunity to assassinate my character. I'd brought a genuine blessing from outside but instead of receiving it with joy they chose instead to destroy my good character and protect their own position. They quenched the fire. They stopped the blessing coming to the people. This happens not only in Ethiopia of course.

Jessie Penn-Lewis was the controlling woman who quenched the fires of the Welsh revival. At its height Evan Roberts quit leading and moved to her estate. Penn-Lewis influenced Evan to see things her way. He eventually tried to make a comeback but never really returned to ministry of any kind. He never married, and became a poet, mired in general obscurity. Mrs Penn-Lewis continued as a speaker, and was well known in her circles and at various conventions. Human elements and ego can so easily kill a great move of the Holy Spirit. The Bible warns us in 1 Thessalonians 5, Quench not the Spirit.

Despise not prophesying. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

People can so easily extinguish the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned they want to quench my paper called *Speak Out*. In *Speak Out* I address cultural, social and economic issues as they touch upon the things of God. It all came about through prayer and intercession. In Ethiopia people are not encouraged to speak out. Women are not allowed to speak out. Children are not allowed to speak out. They're told to keep quiet. Told to listen. Told they don't know anything.

Too many spiritual people are not speaking out. Many don't know how to listen to God. If a Christian leader can't hear from God then how can they possibly speak out for God? But thankfully God is a God who speaks throughout all generations. There's never a time when God is silent. If God were silent the whole world would be in trouble.

1 Samuel 3 says, In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. Then Samuel was born through Hannah's intercession. Samuel is a son of prayer. Samuel was dedicated to the work of the Temple. One night the boy Samuel thought Eli was calling him when in fact it was God who was calling. Eli told Samuel to go back to sleep. These are

words all too familiar to God's true prophets. Too often spiritual leaders who can't hear from God tell the prophets to *go back to sleep*. When are we going to wake up?

When Samuel approached the priest for the third time Eli finally realised God was talking to the boy. So Eli told Samuel, Go and lie down, and if he calls you again say, Speak Lord for your servant is listening.

Speak Out has the dual meaning of God speaking out to his people and his people speaking out and passing the message on. My messages in *Speak Out* come to me through prayer and fasting. They are prophetic utterances that speak to the whole church and to the nations about poverty and social injustice. I recently wrote about the church and politics. I believe individual Christians can be involved in politics but not pastors and church leaders. They have a different and a higher calling. The church mustn't entangle itself in politics.

Many Ethiopian evangelical leaders are not happy with me writing like this. They are content with the status quo. Don't want to rock the boat. The Ethiopian government has also warned me not to mention anything concerning justice issues. Prophets are not called to be politicians but like Isaiah they can

encourage politicians to do what is right. Persuade them to seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow.

Christian leaders should always be involved in the higher spiritual issues. I believe in the separation of church and state. The bride of Christ should not be under the rule of any government. In Ethiopia the Marxists told us religion was an ideology of the capitalist system. There is some truth in this because in many countries religion has indeed been used in conjunction with political ideologies. This should not be so.

The word of God is to proclaim truth and justice. Its purpose is to bring people into spiritual freedom. When politics and religion become intertwined they always suppress justice and freedom rather than promote them. The pure gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ should never be wedded with politics. Politics is all about manipulation and manoeuvre. The gospel of the Kingdom of God is all about righteousness, joy and peace and becoming like Jesus and taking the form of a servant.

But I've found if the Lord gives you a vision it'll not only be Satan and his demons that stand against you.

Often it'll also be fellow believers as well. Struggling with the church authorities has always been my main problem. Usually they want to control you and have you under their thumb. Otherwise they'll crush your ministry. And if people do begin to follow your ministry you will normally have big trouble from jealous believers.

Before I became a refugee, in my early days as a pastor in Addis Ababa, we lived in a bad slum area. One toilet amongst thirty families. When I'd come home after preaching my wife fetched a bucket of water and poured it over me. That was my shower. Some church members said, Why don't we build a house for pastor Kebede. In those days the communist government was redistributing land taken back from the rich. The church members said we should apply for land so as to build me a house.

I said, I don't have any money. I'm like Abraham who lived his life in tents. If the Lord tells me to pack up and move I can do so immediately. My life is a life of going. I have never been settled. How can I build a house?

They said, Let's try anyway. They wrote a letter and were awarded free land. I was shocked. They started calling it Pastor Kebede's land. After three months

there was a fence around it. Then a water pipe was connected. A guard was employed to watch the pipe. Money was collected and bricks were bought. In no time at all I had a debt free home. Hamalemale was happy, our children overjoyed.

Our own place with toilet and shower! Almost Heaven Ethiopia! When I fled during the days of *The Red Terror* I give Hamalemale the power of attorney as regards our home. Eventually when she and our children left she handed over the house keys to a Christian businessman I'd been a spiritual father to. I'd baptised him and his wife. I used to conduct a weekly Bible study in their home. It was agreed he'd live in and look after the house rent-free until we returned.

This man tricked my wife. He said, Kebede is my brother. He is my father. You can trust me. Something unforeseen might happen. Your mom is old. She might need money. Who knows what may happen. Give me the right to sell the house and you can keep your options open. He asked her to sign a piece of paper. Hamalemale was a trusting person. She signed the letter.

When we first arrived in Canada, we heard this man was renovating our home making it bigger and better

with an inside toilet. We wrote and asked, Why are you doing this?

He replied, Don't worry. I'm just making it nice for you. When you return you can have it again.

Ruth and I rented a place during our first year back in Ethiopia but because we'd only a small missionary stipend we couldn't continue to do this. One night while praying I remembered I still owned my former home in Addis Abba. So one day I went to the man who was in my house and said, Brother I've returned to Ethiopia. Thank you for looking after my home. But as agreed I'm back in the country where my umbilical cord is buried and I want my inheritance back.

He said, Let me buy this house. This area is not good for you after living in Canada. You should buy another house where white people live. I have invested so much money in this house now. Let me keep it.

I said, God supplied this house. It was built by my church and given to me by God. I want it back.

We couldn't agree but thankfully some believers helped make peace between us. In the end he said, Okay, give me back all the money I've invested into the house and I'll return it to you. Ruth and I had no money apart from our missionary support yet we negotiated as if our father owned the cattle on a thousand hills. We brought a solicitor, we agreed a sum and we signed the contract. And we waited for God to help.

One evening Ruth's dad called from Canada. I can still see Ruth phone in hand, jumping and shouting, Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

I thought she was going to break the phone cord.

I asked, What's the matter?

She said, My aunt's dead.

You're happy because your aunt is dead?

Ruth laughed. No silly. I'm not happy because my aunt is dead. I'm happy because she has left me some money in her will. And guess what?

What?

It's the exact amount we need to redeem the house.

We paid the money and give the former tenant three months grace before he'd have to move out. But although we showed him mercy he wasn't kind to us. He completely stripped the house of all fixtures and fittings. He removed the built in wardrobe and pulled out the toilet bowl, shower and all light fittings. It looked like a vandalised house. He even took the doors. The solicitor suggested we sue him but we hadn't the heart. Ruth was sad and I was depressed when we moved into our wrecked home.

After a year deep sorrow came into my heart. In prayer I shed many tears of pain. In a night vision the Lord said, Kebede, soon you will stand at the graveside of the man who wrecked your home. You will help bury him. I jumped from my bed. I said, No, Lord. Don't let him die. I forgave him, Lord. I prayed and cried until morning.

A few days later a friend told us the former tenant was dead. I went to his funeral and stood at his graveside just like in the vision. Soon afterwards his business failed. Everything went wrong. His wife and children

became poor and destitute. Perhaps they had fallen into the judgement of God. I don't know but that night as I looked out into the starlight through the breakage he'd left in my roof I was in deep sorrow.

God is a righteous judge. In the book of Psalms it says, Don't touch my anointed one and do my prophets no harm. Because of them, he rebuked Kings and brought famine in the land. God will not allow people to get away with harming his servants. There are consequences. There really is a law of sowing and reaping. Things were tough in Ethiopia. Our missionary stipend was never enough. Without that house we couldn't have survived.

For five years we didn't have a proper cooker, only a small kerosene heater that stank the whole house. We didn't have a fridge. We only had a mattress on the floor. We didn't have a sofa. We only had a couple of cheap bamboo chairs. Yet Ruth never complained. Ruth is fully dedicated to the work of the Lord. She never gives up.

Although she comes from a background of privilege and comfort she doesn't care about fancy toilets and the like. She uses the church's pit latrine without a second thought. Even I, a natural born Ethiopian, can't bear to use the church's pit latrine but to Ruth

it's not a problem. Because we lived in a poor area Ruth was constantly hounded by beggars. It never bothered her. Only a person with a true calling can continue to live in such circumstances.

In Ethiopia, we speak Amharic, a difficult language for a foreigner to learn. Ruth has tried her best to learn it. She has lived and worked amid strangers who don't speak English. Financially things have always been tight. Often we don't eat. We're not very good fundraisers. Ruth often goes without so the street children may be fed and clothed. I am sure she will have a great reward in heaven. She is a wonderful wife and co-worker in the ministry. Truly a blessing from God!

9.

War on the Saints

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Those who operate in miraculous signs and wonders and healing carry on this ministry. That's why the kingdom of darkness hates them. They are special targets for Satan. During communism many Ethiopians were almost worshipping the great American healing evangelist A. A. Allen. We read his magazines and heard his stories. We sent money from Ethiopia for him. I cut his picture from a magazine and stuck it on my bedroom wall. What a man of God!

What an inspiration! He healed the sick. He raised the dead. He threw his coat and people were anointed when his jacket touched them. Healing oil would flow from his hands onto the floor. Even the ushers at his meetings dripped oil from their hands. I saw a photograph of one usher holding his hands away from his clothes so the oil dripping from his hands wouldn't stain them.

I saw a telecast of A. A. Allen in which a toothless woman came forward for prayer. Allen laid his hands on her and immediately thirty-two brand-new teeth appeared in her mouth. Not false teeth but real teeth in her gums. Nowadays I've heard people are receiving golden teeth in place of rotten ones in many places in the world. Isn't that a great sign and wonder? Gold represents the glory. Imagine having the glory of God in your mouth. You'd then certainly be able to testify for Jesus.

I was stunned when I heard A. A. Allen was found dead in his hotel bedroom from alcohol poisoning. His examined body was full of alcohol. It hurts me to think of this. It hurts my heart. It hurts the people who believed in his ministry.

Who knows what warfare he went through? Yet the people always want their healers squeaky clean.

Our Bible School teachers warned us about miracle workers. They said, These people are not living holy lives. They're just showmen after your money. I knew a miracle worker in Nairobi. Let's call him Jo Jo. He had a huge church of 3,000 people. I've never seen anyone as powerful as Jo Jo. He cast out demons and raised the dead. He had a powerful healing and evangelistic ministry. All the televangelists in the Western world couldn't hold a candle to Jo Jo. The choir would be singing. Suddenly he'd come to the pulpit. Immediately the presence of the Lord would invade the place. It was like all the oxygen left from your lungs. Instantly three thousand people became as quiet as mice.

Jo Jo starts giving words of knowledge. You have cancer of the lungs. Come here. You have a death spirit, come here quickly. You have terminal cancer and a week to live, come here. That woman in the blue dress come here. You've been healed of diabetes and blindness. People were falling in the Spirit all over the place. Instantly healed. They were laughing and crying and squealing with joy. I've never seen anything like it. He prayed for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. A wall of heavenly sound filled the place. Jo Jo takes the microphone and sings, *My Religion Is Not A Fashion*. Suddenly the Holy Spirit moves over the crowd like a mighty wind. You can feel it. Glory!

Our Bible School teachers said, Don't follow this Jo Jo. He's not living a holy life. I thought they were just being jealous. I thought, What are these dry-as-a-bone white people doing cursing an African man of God? We students were flocking like sparrows to Jo Jo's meetings. We delighted in him. A friend from England sent me a cheque. I didn't trust my teachers to cash it for me. After Sunday church I approached Jo Jo. I said, Could you please cash this cheque for me. He said, No problem. He put the cheque into his pocket and that's the last I ever saw of it.

Many times I'd go to his office looking for the money but there were always excuses. Six months passed. One Saturday I was passing the church. Jo Jo would rarely be there on Saturday. Nevertheless I decided to look in. I knocked at his office door and peeked in his window. Inside, a man with his back to me was struggling with a woman.

She was screaming, Let me alone! Let me alone!
Why are you doing this?

The man turned at my knocking. It was Jo Jo. I was stunned. The door opened. The woman rushed past me shouting, He calls himself a pastor. Does he want to rape me?

I asked, What's happening Jo Jo?

He said, Don't worry Kebede. That is a crazy demon possessed woman. Forget her!

What could I say? I never mentioned the money. There was an American missionary working with Jo Jo. I told him about the cheque. He said, Maybe money is Jo Jo's weakness. I'll sort things out. He gave me the cash out of his own pocket. There was a beautiful fair skinned woman at the church who fell pregnant by Jo Jo. Then it emerged three other churchwomen also had children by Jo Jo. Big ructions. In the end Jo Jo was asked to leave. He restarted his ministry elsewhere but the glory was gone. The world, the flesh and the devil had won again.

I remember another anointed signs and wonders healer. Let's call her Wanda. There was a graduate from our Bible School. Let's call him Matu. Matu was an evangelist. He had some disagreement with his home church. Evangelists and prophets are often in trouble with their churches but in Kenya one can easily be a travelling evangelist. You can just go from church to church healing people, bringing people to

faith in Christ and praying for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Even the public schools will be open to you. They will call all their students into a big hall and let you preach and pray for them.

Matu went to a certain school and asked if he could preach. The principal gathered the students together. Wanda who was only sixteen was one of these students. She was healed of some small sickness and was baptised in the Holy Spirit. She began to speak in tongues. She went home. Her grandmother was near death. She testified to the whole family about Jesus as a healer and laid hands on her grandmother who was immediately healed.

There was a wild man in Nairobi city who went about naked and crazy like the Gaderene demoniac. The whole city knew him. Wanda thought, Surely if God can heal my grandmother then he can heal this naked madman. She went and found him on the street. She held up his hands and cried out in tongues. The crazy man was totally healed and delivered. Everyone heard about this. Next day newsmen arrived. They took a picture of this delivered man in a brand new suit and tie. They put this alongside an old picture of him on the front page of the paper. A prophetess has come in our country, they said. She is healing people. Look at the change in this wild man.

The next morning, the blind, the lame and the halt were camped outside Wanda's home. Ambulances, taxies, people on stretchers, Muslims and Christians. Seemed like the whole world had beaten a pathway to Wanda's door. When healing breaks out the sick come out of the woodwork. Wanda started speaking in tongues and shouting Hallelujah. The people were healed in droves.

Nairobi was in uproar. The newspapers were full of it. I was in the bush preaching when I read about it. I immediately caught a bus and came up in search of Wanda. When I arrived a crowd of thousands had gathered. Matu the evangelist preached a little about healing. Then Wanda stood up and prayed in tongues continuously. Then she began to shout the name of Jesus.

I felt like a shower of glory passed all over me. I'd never experienced anything like it. People started screaming, Hallelujah I'm healed. All over the place people were throwing away crutches and taking off callipers and braces and getting out of wheelchairs and walking about. I thought of the place in scripture where it talks about the dead rising out of their graves after Jesus was crucified. It was amazing.

Throughout it all Wanda never preached or laid hands on anyone. She just spoke in tongues and proclaimed the name of Jesus.

The mystery to me was that God didn't give a big healing ministry to the evangelist who'd prayed for Wanda in the first place. He gave it to a young girl who didn't even know how to pray properly. Soon Wanda and Matu were holding mass crusades all over the country. She was taking Kenya by storm in a tsunami of signs and wonders. Some people were taking pictures of Wanda and selling them to the sick who were putting Wanda's picture on their bodies in the hope of being healed. The whole city was in upheaval. God's power was in their midst.

Missionaries and Christian leaders arrived on the scene. They organised a committee. They were concerned that Matu and Wanda, who were unmarried were travelling together. They said all things must be done decently and in order. They talked of proper protocol. They organised the Holy Ghost.

In the end they sent Wanda off to some Bible School. I don't know where she is now. Someone told me she came back after many years and has a small church somewhere. But she is not functioning as before. The leaders put their hand to the ark and stopped the glory.

Well-intentioned people kill the Glory. Satan kills the Glory. Sin kills the Glory. God can work amazing signs and wonders but Christian leaders can kill the Glory. These missionaries were afraid or jealous or both. I don't know.

I only know I have seen this fantastic thing. A young uneducated black woman screaming the name of Jesus and multitudes being healed and delivered.

10.

Ebony & Ivory

One day I was checking in at Addis Ababa airport. There was a family of Ethiopians in front and a Ghanaian diplomat behind me. It so happened the family knew the lady on the check-in desk. The check-in lady and the family started greeting one another in an African fashion.

How are you? they laughed as they kissed one other. They asked about family matters and how was this one and how was that one. How is your mother? Is her back still sore? What age is Esther now? How are the chickens? Guess how many cows we have now? Is your sister married yet?

I thought, Don't these people realise they are holding up the queue.

The Ghanaian diplomat noticed my agitation. He said, Brother, have you lived in the Western society?

I nodded.

Ah! That's why you are so annoyed, he said. This expansive greeting is an expression of pure African culture. They kiss. They laugh. They meet and honour one another as human beings with dignity. Here everyone is not reduced to a number or a commodity. Here people matter more than time or money. These people are genuinely concerned about their children, their sheep and their cows because they value and respect one another.

The diplomat said, I love Ethiopia. I've lived here for nearly twenty years. Ethiopia is where I've learned to appreciate my true African identity. I used to act like a Western person. I thought Western ways were best. White missionaries baptised me. They gave me a Christian name. I thought like a Western person. I worked like a Western person. My whole attitude was Western but when I came to Ethiopia I discovered my roots. Here people think differently. Their psychology is different. They are proud of their ethnicity. They don't kowtow to the West. They treat people as people. They love one another.

He said, Brother if there was no Ethiopia there'd be no real Africa. All the rest of the continent has been colonised. We don't know our identity anymore. We thought we should be like the Europeans with European names. I used to sing, *God Save The Queen*, but thank God, Ethiopia has given me my identity back.

I remembered how my father raised me to be proud to be Ethiopian. He trained me to swim, to shoot a gun and to ride a horse. He raised me to be patriotic. He said an Ethiopian should be prepared to die for his country, his land and for his wife. He told me of all the nations in Africa, Ethiopians were never defeated or colonised. Of course there are two sides to this

patriotic coin. One side teaches us to be loyal and responsible to our nation and culture. The other side can make us ethnocentric and closed to outsiders. Jomo Kenyatta the first Kenyan President said, White people came to Africa and gave us a Bible. They told us to close our eyes and pray but when we opened our eyes we discovered they had stolen our land. We still had the Bible but the land was gone.

Although there is some truth to this statement I believe God's will is that black and white believers must learn to work together in mutual love and respect for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. There should be no racism or prejudice in Christ's church. Also I can't imagine anything much worse than a proud beggar.

At Bible School I was invited to a PACLA conference in Nairobi. PACLA is short for *Pan African Christian Leadership Association*. This organisation was involved in the reconciliation movement between blacks and whites. That's what brought the political changes in South Africa.

Michael Cassidy was the main leader of this organisation. He was a very spiritual person. He greatly impressed my life. The conference was packed with African leaders. White and black South

Africans in the same place. All African flags on display. Things were going great until radical black South Africans complained about the racist South African flag. Delegates from other militant African nations joined in. They said, Take that racist South Africa flag down or we'll leave. This issue became a ticking time-bomb.

Someone said, These white South Africans act like Christians. They sit together with us in this meeting but when the conference ends they fly home first-class while we have to take rickety buses. We can't even walk in the same streets as them. We can't drink from the same water or use the same toilets. It's all very well to sit together in this meeting and pretend we have unity but out in the real-world things are very different. Stop this hypocrisy.

The Zulus stated to sing a war song. We Ethiopians joined them. Michael Cassidy was a patient and a wise man. He kept his composure. His peaceful expression never changed. He said, Yes, we are white South African Christians but we don't support the apartheid system. We are risking our lives and the lives of our families by being here. Yes we want change. Yes we want God's will and God's justice in South Africa and all over Africa. We are doing all that we possibly can. We are here because we want

change. We are here because we love you. He asked for an apology on behalf of the white South Africans who were in attendance from the black people and he got it. He then spoke to the news media people. He said, Please don't report this incident. We have to return to South Africa. If some of our enemies hear of this fiasco we will be in big trouble. Let us walk in the unity and humility of the Holy Spirit, brothers and sisters.

He brought us together and managed to continue the meetings in a loving way. When people jumped up and disagreed with him he'd always handle them with grace. I was really impressed by his fatherly tolerance. I also heard, South African-born, David Du Plessis was used mightily in bringing Catholics into the baptism of the Holy Spirit. One thing he spoke really stayed with me. He said before the Lord allowed him to work amongst Catholics he had to walk in a spirit of forgiveness instead of a judgmental spirit.

He said, We need to have a spirit of forgiveness if we are operating in the area of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If we're functioning out of unforgiveness God is not working with us. He said he'd been suspicious of the Catholic Church because he'd been taught it was a harlot's church from which the Antichrist would come. But the Lord told David to forgive the

Catholics because God was going to use them mightily in the last days. David told us, It's not what we Protestants think about Catholics that counts. The important thing is how God sees them. Jesus will build his own church in his own way.

David said when he humbled himself the Lord gave him a spirit of forgiveness towards the Catholic Church and enabled him to reach a place where he'd never be offended again. He said, No matter what people say or what people do against me I will never be upset for if I get caught in an offence it will soon grow into a grudge, which can so easily develop into bitterness. Love covers a multitude of sins while a root of bitterness defiles many people.

He said, By God's grace my heart is now full of love. So when I preach the Holy Spirit just flows through me unhindered by judgmentalism.

Now when I pray for baptism in the Spirit the people so easily speak in tongues. That's how the Lord has opened the door for me to the highest levels in the Catholic Church. David even met the Pope who called him *Mr Pentecost*.

I was amazed when David Du Plessis revealed this truth to us. I personally have never reached this point of not being offended in my life. I can still so easily be rubbed up the wrong way. I am still challenged by David's words. Michael Cassidy and David Du Plessis were two white Christians who impressed me in my early days. Michael Cassidy for his patient love and humble leadership and David Du Plessis for his willingness to abandon the prejudices of a lifetime in order to do God's will.

My involvement with white Christians has involved grapes and giants, good and bad. The good at Bible School was the acceptance and wisdom of Jeffrey Huxley and his deep teaching of the word of God. The bad were the institutionalised colonialism and racism inherent in the system.

One day Mekru and I bussed it to Mombasa to swim at its beautiful coastline. There were only white people at the beach when we arrived. When Mekru and I ran into the ocean all the white people ran out. We thought there were sharks so we ran out as well. After a while the white people ran back in again and started swimming. Mekru and I also ran back in.

Again the white people ran out. It was then we realised it wasn't black sharks that were scaring them

out of the sea it was black Ethiopians. When we'd come out to sunbathe the white people would go back in again to swim. We waited until a big group of white people were swimming then Mekru and I'd suddenly rush back into the ocean and all the whites rushed out.

One white man came over. He asked, Where are you guys from?

We're from Africa.

Where in Africa?

East Africa.

Where in East Africa?

Ethiopia.

Ah! He said, That's what makes the difference. He shook our hands and became friendly. He said, This beach is open for all people but Kenyans never come. In Kenya they say, Teswali Musungu Manungo,

which means God and white people are the same. This is what the colonials taught them. So many Kenyans have an inferiority complex because of this lie. They are not confident enough to come here and swim. But you Ethiopians don't care. You're not afraid. He told us he was a teacher in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia. He said President Kennedy sent him to teach there.

He told us a story. He said, I was teaching in the bush. One student kept calling me *ferengi*, which is an Amharic word for foreigner. I told him to be quiet. He ignored me. He kept on in a singsong voice, Ferengi, ferengi, ferengi!

I took a stick and spanked him on his backside. Big mistake. The whole class jumped up to his defence. A student shouted, Why are you striking an Ethiopian like this?

They grabbed me and started beating me. I had to flee and lock myself in the principal's office. I was immediately transferred to another school. I quickly learned not to mess with Ethiopians. Yet in spite of that I've come to love Ethiopians. I appreciate their grit and determination. They have a good self-image. They do not bow down to white people always asking for a handout. I love them for that.

I knew a white missionary in Ethiopia. One day he parked his car. Some small children looking for work asked him, Sir, can we watch your car for you.

He shouted, I don't need you to watch my car! Go away!

The children became angry. One said, Go away? Where shall we go? This is our country. You are the *ferengi*. You go away. They took sticks and stones and chased him for his life.

In Ethiopia you can't just take a photograph without the people's permission. One white man took a picture of some children. The kids got angry. They said, This *ferengi* has taken our picture without asking us. They ran after the photographer and wrestled him to the ground. They made him take the film out of the camera and give it to them. Ethiopians don't like being treated like objects to be photographed by tourists.

When we were new immigrants to Canada a Christian black lady came to visit us. I collected her at the bus station. She wanted a cup of tea before our long walk home. While we were in the cafe someone stole a

vehicle from a nearby car park. The police had gathered.

Someone said, I saw a black man and woman going into that café. The police came and accused us of stealing the car.

Why are you accusing us? I said. Is it because we are black? Is it only black people who steal in this country? What a shock! I'd only been in Canada for a few days and I was accused of stealing a car because of my skin colour. Black people are also harassed by traffic police more than white people. One day in Vancouver, a pastor loaned Ruth and me his truck. We were driving along Skidmore Road, an area known for drug trafficking. Suddenly with sirens roaring and lights flashing, the police pulled us in and accused us of being drug pushers. They asked for our ID.

The policeman asked, What are you doing here?

I said, We are missionaries.

He sneered, Missionaries?

I said, I'm a pastor.

Pastor?

Ruth said, We are married.

He said, Married? This man is your husband?

He didn't believe we were telling the truth. He clamped the van and made the pastor come and collect it. We had to take a taxi home.

Unpleasant things like this happen too often to black people. This shouldn't be so. In Canada black people face racism all the time. They experience it in the church and outside the church. But we need to realise God will not bless racism in any shape or form. I believe this is why revival tarries in the West. There have been numerous prayer conferences for reconciliation but I believe because of the prevalence of a spirit of racism within the wider church God cannot answer these prayers.

In South Africa a young Mahatma Gandhi went along to a Christian church to investigate the claims of Christ. He wanted to know if Christianity could be a better way than the demoniac caste system of Hinduism. The white usher stopped Gandhi at the door. He asked, What are you doing here?

Gandhi Said, I've come to learn about Jesus Christ.

The usher said, In that case you should go to the black church on the other side of town. We only allow white people here. Gandhi realised there was also a very strong caste system within Christianity. He said he was very impressed by Christ but not by Christians.

A fellow Ethiopian refugee told me a story. Ethiopians like Italians like to eat raw meat on occasion. He was staying in a hostel. One day he was eating some raw meat when a young white woman came into the communal kitchen. She screamed and fainted. Others rushed into the room. The Ethiopian was badly shaken. When the lady came out of her faint she claimed the Ethiopian was a cannibal. She said he was eating a baby. They locked him in the kitchen and called the police. The police came, handcuffed him and took him and the remainder of the meat to the police station. They tested the meat in the police laboratory before they released him. In the end

the refugee had to leave that hostel because the people were convinced he was a savage. So much for fine dining!

I have experienced Christian racism in Canada. I was the first black pastor in Broadway Church alongside nine other pastors. The main pastor, Alan Hornby was a very godly man. He said, Kebede if anyone acts racist towards you please tell me immediately. I will not tolerate racism in this church. Some fellow pastors said, Kebede you're lucky Alan favours you. Normally a pastor in this church needs to be trained in Canada. You are fortunate you are treated as an equal amongst us.

Over the years I've noticed white people tend to think black preachers have no time awareness. Often they over scrutinise our words. They also don't believe a black person can really be trusted with finances. They think we are trying to get money under false pretences. All this makes me so sad. We should not view scripture through the prism of cultural perspectives. The Bible is a book that chronicles the journey of culturally diverse peoples seeking God's will. We must remember Jesus was not a white man. He was an Afric-Asiatic-Galilean Jew with a Jewish name.

The Bible speaks against racism, sexism, and classism. It always speaks of liberation, community and empowerment. Throughout scripture there is a consistent call to oneness and the intentional inclusion of people who are marginalized by society and often by the community of faith itself. Of course white people are not the only racists. Once in Ethiopia an old woman asked me, Why did you marry a white woman when there were so many beautiful eligible Ethiopian women? Did that white woman bribe you to marry her?

Another time Ruth and I were buying vegetables in the Addis Ababa market. An elderly vendor said, Why are you here buying food in the market? If you'd married a good Ethiopian woman she would've shopped and prepared your food while you drank coffee with your friends. But instead you marry a colonial and you're shopping here like a white woman's slave boy.

When we walk in Ethiopia children flock around Ruth and ask for money. When I try to shoo them away they often turn on me angrily and hiss in Amharic, Shut up driver. What business is it of yours if we ask this whittie for money? They think I am Ruth's servant. Ethiopian shop owners regularly over-charge Ruth. If I intervene they say, Driver, what do you

care if I rip-off a white woman? Don't you want to help us Ethiopians?

I reply, This white woman is my wife. It's me you're ripping off.

I feel sorry for racist people. It is a great sin to degrade your brother. Racism like so many things begins in the home in the formative years. Some people even think they're doing God's work by being racist. Many South Africans believed apartheid was God's will. They even formulated a theology that said black people didn't have a soul. They then used this doctrine of demons to justify their consequent stealing of land and enslavement of Africans. Can you imagine Jesus doing these things?

Some black people have reacted to white racist theology and have instead created an African theology that has rejected all white missionary influence. They see missionaries as agents of the white colonial empire teaching a capitalist self-centred God. In reaction to the white man's ethnocentricity they claim Jesus Christ was black. Liberation theology is just another reaction to Christian imperialism.

I once visited a church in Lusaka where I was shocked to see the pastors recruiting guerrilla fighters and handing out guns.

Killing people for Jesus is never biblical.

11.

Money Talks!

Ruth and I were excited to be in Ethiopia. We decided to open a church near the University in order to reach the privileged and educated students. But God's ways are not our ways. Instead it was the deprived and untutored street children who became the focus and foundation of our work.

Each time we stopped at traffic lights in Addis Ababa begging children would surround the car. Ruth was shocked at their condition. Then she discovered we could buy vouchers from a Christian charity that provided meals for the poor. So we started giving them food vouchers. Soon all the street children knew Ruth. They began to call her Mama. They'd shout, We're hungry Mama! Please help us Mama!

Ruth often overspent in order to buy vouchers for these children. I wasn't happy when it was we who went hungry. Near the main Post Office, Ruth discovered two blind girls begging. They stood in the same spot all day going to the toilet just where they were. There was a terrible stench. Sometimes a passing motorist would throw a coin or a banana at them like you'd feed a monkey in the zoo.

An older blind man ran this begging racket. He brought blind children from the countryside under the false pretence that he'd teach and train them. Once in the city he used them as beggars. The blind leading the blind. He had bigger boys in his employ that walked the girls to and from their begging spot each day. The girls were around ten years old when Ruth found them.

They'd been begging for six years. Ruth was heartbroken by their plight. She couldn't sleep thinking about them. Each day before noon she brought them food and oranges and told them in Amharic that God loved them. They were full of smiles when Ruth visited. Ruth wondered if there was not an Ethiopian law against such child abuse so we went to the Children's Welfare Office and reported this situation.

The commissioner said Ethiopia had indeed signed an International Charter concerning children's rights but admitted they hadn't the necessary funds to enforce it. Nor had they any place to put the children. He looked to me and said, If this white woman wants she can take these blind girls off the streets and train them herself. He gave us a letter of authority to this effect.

So we took the girls to our home. We called one Zion and the other Lydia. Somehow the blind man got our phone number. He said if Ruth didn't return the children immediately he'd have her killed. We reported him to the Blind Association. That was the last we heard from him. The girls were in poor health. Their skin was in awful condition with various rashes. They had irritating jigger fleas burrowed into their little feet. They had a continual cough.

Ruth who was looking after them started coughing and vomiting. She was in excruciating pain. I feared I'd lose her. In Ethiopia it's very hard to get the right doctor and the right medication. One doctor gave her a painkiller and sent us home. After a while the unbearable pain returned. We went back to the hospital. The doctor gave her another dose of painkillers. When these wore off Ruth collapsed in my arms. We returned to the doctor. He tore up her file and told us to leave the hospital. He said, I don't know anything about this woman. She has never been a patient of mine. Don't come back here. By this time Ruth was unconscious in the back of the taxi. I thought, Lord I am going to lose my wife.

We drove to another hospital where the doctor was drunk and sleeping. I took Ruth to yet to another hospital. Sometimes she'd momentarily gain consciousness only to collapse again. The sight of a white woman lying on a hospital floor was a strange sight to many. No one knew what to do.

I phoned Ruth's dad in Canada. He'd bought medical insurance for Ruth. He advised us to contact the Canadian embassy. They directed us to a special clinic at the British Embassy. That is how we first met Dr Seifu, who looked at Ruth, tapped her on the back and immediately diagnosed pneumonia. Thank

God for Dr Seifu. Ruth was able to leave the hospital in ten days. Over the years Ruth has been especially vulnerable to two things in Ethiopia, food poisoning and pneumonia.

We sent Zion and Lydia to a special school for the blind. Now Zion is at university and Lydia is back home with her parents whom we located. Ruth had previously worked in Uganda with street children. Back in Ethiopia she fell in love with the street kids all over again. The rainy season poses a huge difficulty for street children. We rented a building to use as a church. One day around twenty of the street kids came to us. Their leader said, We can't cope with this rain. Please let us sleep on the veranda of your church.

We granted their wish. Then they started coming to church. They hadn't far to travel after all. Ruth said, Kebede, we can't leave them sleeping on this open veranda. She asked an Italian man for a forty-foot lorry container. We found some old mattresses and put them into the container. The children were overjoyed. Afterwards we secured some money from the Netherlands Embassy to rent a house and establish a street children's home. We bought bunk beds and blankets. I can still see the happiness of the children. Gradually they started to change.

We bought uniforms and sent them to school. Soon our street children came top of their classes. You have to be smart to survive as a street child. We organised a soccer sports group for them called *Zion Sports Club*. They became the top team in the whole district. They won cups and trophies galore.

Ruth kept telling them they could do all things through Christ who strengthened them. At the same time they started singing and serving in the church. They became our core group. Things were going very well. We were located near the University area of Addis. We held a morning service in Amharic and an afternoon service in English. We also had three Bible classes throughout the week. Our intention was to impact the university students who when they'd graduate would be relocated all over the country.

At one point we allowed American missionaries from a well-known denomination to come and teach in our church and Bible classes. We had about three hundred people attending church and around thirty folk at each Bible class. These missionaries told us they wanted to bless the church in Ethiopia and we offered to help them in whatever way we could.

Then one Monday morning the owner of our church building came and said we had two weeks to vacate

the premises. When the American missionaries realised our church was in a good location and was prospering they decided to steal it from us. They went behind our backs and offered the owner three times more than we were paying. The loss of the building was fatal to us. It meant we lost the vast majority of our congregation in one fell swoop.

Our church people in Ethiopia are very poor. They don't own cars or bicycles. They can't afford buses or taxis. They need a church within walking distance of their homes. Our churches are community churches, not commuting churches. Our people are not mobile like in the West. In Ethiopia if a church relocates it will lose most of its members.

So unable to compete financially we had to leave. These missionaries now have a large thriving church in our old place. Eventually they bought the whole building. I was so discouraged. In those days we had a big banner in our church that proclaimed, *Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts*. But now I realise we also need money. God has to release money alongside the anointing. Even if one is anointed enough to call down fire from heaven but is not wealthy and prosperous, especially in this 21st century, then nobody will accept them.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not money I have become like a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Nowadays it seems no one will listen to a poor man. No one will value him as a man of God. It's not how much anointing is upon you but how much money is in your pocket. So many Christians have turned to materialism and have lost their first love. We have become like the rich young ruler. Only now we don't need to sell all to follow Jesus. Now we can keep all, act like the world and still follow Jesus. If Christianity becomes big business, adopting sharp exploitive practices it shall surely fail. God will surely cleanse his church from these moneymen as surely as Jesus cleared the moneychangers from the temple.

One time Peter and John said, We have no silver and gold but we will give you what we have. In Jesus' name rise up and walk. But nowadays some churches say we have plenty of money, let's buy this or that. Those missionaries acted like Jezebel who stole Naboth's vineyard. They acted like David when he took Bathsheba from righteous Uriah. Nathan the prophet said, David has stolen and killed the poor man's lamb when he had thousands of his own sheep.

Some people think Ethiopia is cursed because we are poor but we must remember it is economics and not God that keeps the Third World in poverty. In Ethiopia most of our income comes from agriculture. Nowadays Western economists can destroy any nation by the stroke of a pen. It's not God who is cursing our people. It's unjust nations refusing us a fair price for our labour and denying us the use of modern technology and fertiliser. We're always in debt to the First World, always at the mercy of the capitalist society.

It's human greed and not God that keeps us poor. There was an Ethiopian communist slogan that said, The capitalist says, Whatever I have is mine. I will keep it. But communist society says, Whatever you have is ours. You have robbed us. We will take it back.

I believe Christianity should say, Whatever is mine is yours. We will share it. We have to maintain a Christian culture, a sharing culture. Living together. Sharing together. Eating together. Dying together. Christianity is not buying and selling. It's giving and receiving. Freely we have received. Freely we give.

Another First World concept that is badly affecting the Third World is the rising trend of Home Missions.

This Home Missions position basically says the Western World needs to evangelise those nearby instead of those at the uttermost parts of the earth. It claims an urgent mission field is just outside their own front doors. So instead of supporting evangelism in Africa, India, China and so on they focus instead on needs in their local communities. Working with single parents, the homeless, child evangelism and so on.

Of course we need to respond to the need in our midst. Of course we need to show the love of Jesus to our own families and our own communities. But surely we cannot forget Jesus' last command to preach the gospel to all nations. Two billion people have never ever heard the name of Jesus even once. Two million Lazarus's waiting for the crumbs of salvation outside the rich man's gate.

Because it's cheaper to do Home Missions many Western churches are moving away from equipping and financing their people for long-term missionary work. Instead they send short-term workers. But without effective training many of these short termers are often immature and ill equipped for long-term effectiveness in difficult cross-cultural fields. Short-term missions and support of nationals overseas are good but are they are not a substitute for the steady growth and development of longer-term missionaries.

This Home Missions trend has also caused many churches to cut down on the proper screening, recruiting, training and sending of long-term missionaries. The fear is someday they'll eliminate both short and long term missionary workers and only send money instead. And in the end they'll forget altogether and stop sending anything at all.

Third World Christians are always hamstrung by the lack of money while some Western churches spends the Lord's money on trinkets. I personally know of one Canadian church that spent thousands of dollars on fairy lights and a singing Christmas tree that sang *Silent Night* and *Jingle Bells*. For a Third World person this seems an incredible waste of money. I remember looking at that singing tree and thinking of what could have been accomplished back home in Ethiopia with only a fraction of that *Jingle Bells* money.

True missionary work is helping the indigenous people build their own churches in their own way. Many rich ministries in the West come to Third World churches that are well established. They are not willing to work with small indigenous churches like ourselves who are in the early stages of development. They go to the big mainline denominations because it looks better for their newsletters.

We need to properly steward our resources in order to finance the Gospel. An Ethiopian woman visited her daughter in America for six months. Back in Ethiopia she was asked, How was it in America? She said, America is an amazing country. A land of plenty. People are working day and night, running here and running there. Always busy. Sometimes they even eat and drink coffee while driving or rushing to catch a bus. They're not like us. They don't take time to sit down and eat with their families. Food is everywhere.

You can buy it from bus stations, train stations and gas stations. Americans run and run and run and run and work and work and work and work. They can get money out of walls using a plastic card. They use this money to buy food. They eat and eat and eat and eat. They become overweight. Then they buy products that promise to make them thin. They play sports and they do exercise. And they run and run and run so they can get thin. But they don't get thin.

Then they go to a big shopping mall and buy lots and lots of clothes. They have clothes in this wardrobe and that wardrobe, in this closet and that closet. There are always clothes for sale at specially reduced prices. Clothes everywhere. They buy and buy and buy and buy. Then Christmas comes and all the clothes are

out of fashion. So they throw out all these clothes and buy new ones.

She said, This is called the consuming society in which you eat without a plan, work without a plan, buy without a plan, dump without a plan and die without a plan. It seems they all want to be thin and fit like us Ethiopians but they take this long way around. They are an amazing people. I never got to understand them in my six months there.

When an Ethiopian refugee comes to the West some salesman will say, Brother you can have a new sofa and you don't have to pay any money for six months. You can have a new car and you don't have to pay any interest. Have a big television. Sign here. You won't have to pay anything for six months. Within a short time the refugee has a car, a sofa and a television. He had none of these things in Ethiopia. He thinks America is heaven on earth.

He doesn't know he has now become a slave bound to material things in a prison of perpetual debt from which he may never escape. He will now live his life in debt paying huge amounts of interest for stuff he never really needed. And Satan will endeavour to keep him in debt so he cannot use his new-found wealth for the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

12.

Meeting Haile Selassie

I remember being very impacted by the failed December 1960 coup attempt to remove Haile Selassie led by Brigadier-General Mengistu Neway and his brother Germane. Germane was a brilliant man, educated and insightful. He'd studied in America with John F Kennedy. I believe had the coup succeeded Ethiopia would now be a more prosperous nation.

I was young but since then I've always wanted things to get better for my people. I hated the unjust feudal system with its lack of opportunity for the ordinary man.

During school holidays I worked in a textile factory and discovered Labour Union, the idea of how poor working people can support one another against exploitation and unfair wages. Poor people always desire a better future for their children. In those days word came that Haile Selassie was taking ordinary children from the street and educating them at his special boarding school near his palace. Before this there were only religious schools where we learned Orthodox prayers and incantations. It was said Haile Selassie wanted to modernize education and allow people to be engineers, doctors, administrators and so on. This seemed like an impossible dream.

Other folk warned that Haile Selassie was taking the children in order to sacrifice them to the devil at a place near a lake. I didn't know who or what to believe. In Ethiopia they say if your eyelashes meet in the middle and join together you are a suitable candidate for devil sacrifice. My eyelashes met in the middle. I decided to be very careful.

It was also a common belief that if one was brave enough to lie down in front of Haile Selassie's state car the Emperor would make the chauffeur stop and extend his hand and grant you a request. A bit like being given a wish in a fairy tale. I often thought about the wonderful possibility of doing this. Then one day it happened. I was playing in the street with some friends when the Emperor's car stopped at the traffic lights. I immediately threw myself under the front wheels, my heart pounding in my ears. Then I heard the voice that could answer my every wish. The last Emperor of Ethiopia was calling to me, Come! Come! Come! His voice was warm and friendly. I stood at the side of the car. He said, What can I do for you?

I blurted, Education! Take me and teach me.

He extended his hand and told me to jump up onto the mudguard. I hesitated. Was he looking at my eyebrows? I yelped and jumped back from the car. He'd said, Jump up, but I'd jumped back. He smiled and waved as the car sped off. That was the first time I met Haile Selassie.

A couple of years later he came to our area for the opening of a new telephone company. I stopped him again. I said, My family are poor. Why don't you

give us money? His bodyguards lifted me by my arms and put me in their car. When my friends saw me sitting in one of Haile Selassie's cars they thought my luck had finally run out as regards my eyebrows.

After the ceremony the bodyguards dropped me off in front of the Police Station. They told me to go and give myself up. Then they sped off. I ran home as fast as my legs could carry me. I was beginning to learn it's a dangerous thing to stand before a king.

I often look back and remember those first fearful attempts of mine at intercession. Nowadays I stand daily before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords with much more focus and faith. I have learned not to be afraid when my King tells me to do something. No more jumping back in fear. I have also learned there is a proper way to approach a King. There is proper protocol for talking to royalty. Hebrews 4 tells us,

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every

way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I was eighteen when I met Haile Selassie for the third time. By then I was a Labour Union leader well used to trouble. I was working at *Berheme Na Selma Printing Press*, which had all the latest technology. It was full of young educated people. I took the opportunity to teach these young folk about socialism and got the sack for my efforts. The management dismissed twenty of us saying there was a downturn in the economy. We knew this was a lie. We appealed to Haile Selassie and were granted an audience. He listened to our complaints. Then he called a police commissioner. He said, Outspoken troublemakers often make good policemen. Give them officer positions.

This is how I was chosen as a writer and trained as a police journalist. A job I had for five years. I loved writing. In primary school, whenever we celebrated some special day I was always the child chosen to

write up the history and read the story out in front of the public.

My penultimate meeting with Haile Selassie occurred when I was an evangelist. I was carrying my Bible. He was in an open topped car. I put up my hand and stopped him. I said, Father Haile Selassie, the Lord has called me to preach the gospel all over Ethiopia. Please give me your blessing. These Orthodox people are not teaching the full gospel.

He looked at me for a long moment. Then he laughed and waved me away.

13.

Bringing Joy To Jesus

The Lord created me to be an Ethiopian and called me to preach his gospel. He chose my family and my nation. Can an Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots? I can't change that situation so I gladly accept God's will for my life.

Remember the story in Luke 16?

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate lay a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table.

Ethiopia is the world's second poorest nation. Twenty percent of our people are constantly in chronic need of food aid. We are like Lazarus, always hoping for the crumbs. Over the years especially through the efforts of Ruth some folk from the West have come to visit. I thank God for each and every single person who has helped us. There have not been many but they have been faithful and sacrificial in their giving. True friends. We couldn't have done it without them. May God remember and reward their kindness. I always pray Hebrews: 6:10 for them:

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Recent statistics have revealed that only one third of a cent of every dollar the North American church spends goes towards reaching the two billion people who've never heard the name of Jesus even once. And sometimes even that one third of a cent is not used wisely. I have to admit the image of the big Western evangelist preaching to massive crowds is a bit of a bee in my bonnet. We've all seen the videos and posters. The truth is many of the hand waving people in these crowds are already believers. In the African crusades I've attended at least three quarters of the crowd are Christian.

In Canada I saw a huge poster indicating that hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians were being saved in such a crusade. Many of the people at the front, whose faces I personally knew, were Christians. Also after these big crusades usually only a very small percentage of new converts ever join a church. It's follow-up work that counts and the local poor churches are rarely resourced for that. Normally big crusades don't financially provide for the poor indigenous pastors and evangelists in the host country. Unfortunately the local believers are usually left no better off.

A few years ago an Ethiopian Christian leader visited me. He said, Kebede, an American evangelist is willing to come to Ethiopia but he won't come for anything less than a crowd of 10,000 people. He has the finance if you can supply the numbers. I told him I wasn't interested in playing games with the Gospel. I said, God sent Phillip from the revival in Samaria to meet one Ethiopian eunuch. Philip didn't say, Lord, I'll only go for 10,000 people.

Ruth and I met a missionary called May who was well into her nineties. Her husband had died but she remained in Africa. She was old and skinny and couldn't walk anymore but she was full of wisdom. She said, What I've learned in my long life is never ever to steal the glory of God. Whatever happens always give the glory to God. Don't steal his glory.

When this old lady spoke there was such an anointing on her. Strong words softly spoken that mightily touched my heart. Afterwards I wept night and day for a month. I thought, How many of us are stealing the glory of God? Instead we must be like John the Baptist. We must decrease and Jesus must increase.

Ethiopians are not easily impressed by preaching. To them a practical demonstration is worth more than a thousand sermons. A missionary couple came to Addis Ababa. One Sunday morning the husband was preaching all the scriptures he knew on love.

He said, We must love one another especially our wives. We must cherish and listen to our wives for they are precious gifts from God.

At this point his wife jumped up and shouted, He's lying. He never listens to me. Why even this morning before church he was arguing with me and wouldn't let me speak.

There was an embarrassed silence. The husband said, Darling, 1 Timothy 2:11-12, says, A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

So please sit down Darling. I will speak to you later.

Back home he said, Darling, why did you embarrass me in church like that? I know we had an argument but I'm only human. It doesn't mean I don't love you.

She said, Why don't you practise what you preach?

He said, From today onwards I will do so. I will practise what I preach. But help me Darling. Please promise you won't jump up any more in church and embarrass me.

She agreed. So they were reconciled. The next Sunday he was preaching about giving. He quoted Jesus who said, Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

The wife sat quietly in the pew her face aglow and her heart stirred at her husband's wonderful words. She was so proud of him. This was the reason they'd come to Ethiopia. The sacrifice was worth it after all.

Next Sunday before church the husband was very agitated. He said, Darling, the missionary superintendent will be in church this morning. I really want to make a good impression but I can't find my new blue Boss suit. Do you happen to know where it is?

She said, Yes, my love. I know where it is. During the week a church member did some work in our garden. His trousers were patched and his jacket was torn. He looked so shabby. Then I remembered your wonderful sermon on giving. So I decided to put your preaching into practice and I gave him your best suit. He will be wearing it this morning. Aren't you proud of me?

Horror-struck, he said, Darling you are an incredible woman but sometimes you don't get it. You need to realize I preached that message for the Ethiopians and not for us. We are the missionaries. God has sent *us* here to teach *them*.

The Ethiopian government allows Christians to function only if they're involved in caring for the poor. I've no problem with this. James said, Faith without works is dead. Isaiah 58 warning about religious hypocrisy says,

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

To loose the chains of injustice

And untie the cords of the yoke,

To set the oppressed free

And break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry
And to provide the poor wanderer with shelter,
When you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to turn away from your own
flesh and blood?

Jesus told us to let our light shine before men so they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. So we run the social work side by side but we don't mix it with the spiritual work. In a land of famine we don't believe in rice Christians. Our projects are totally humanitarian. We don't discriminate by gender, colour, race, tribe or belief. Everyone is equal. Evaluation is based on the level of need.

We work with AIDS victims, prostitutes, street children, handicapped people and famine victims. We are involved in healthcare, training, education, and food and water projects. We always respond to the many needs.

The social development side of our ministry is called *Zion Trust Community Based Integrated Sustainable Development* or ZTCBISD for short. We like long names in Africa. James also says, Religion that God

our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Widows and orphans are always vulnerable especially in the Third World. We soon realised we couldn't only focus on children. Children have parents. There might also be a disabled person in the family. Wars and famines have left a tremendous number of crippled, disabled and blind people in Ethiopia.

AIDS is a growing problem affecting at least 5% of the population. We have an AIDS project aimed at providing supplementary nutrition, medicine and support to the sufferers. We educate people about AIDS. How to take prevention and how not to stigmatise the afflicted. We also have qualified social workers, going from home to home to ensure people can die with dignity and be buried with honour and respect.

In Ethiopia, disabled people are reckoned to be cursed. We counter this erroneous thinking with scriptures that tell of how precious all human life is.

Like from Psalm 139, which says,

For you created my inmost being;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
Your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
When I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of
the earth,
Your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
Were written in your book
Before one of them came to be.

We work with hundreds of disabled folk of all ages.
We train them in a range of useful skills: computers,
dressmaking, typing, waitressing, block making and
so on.

Over the years many have gained employment and a new hope in life. Some are now self-supporting. We also run a health education clinic in various areas. Basic knowledge of personal hygiene is of enormous benefit to the people and prevents a host of diseases. We adopt a holistic approach in everything we do. We are always trying to reach the whole person, body soul and spirit.

Females are the most vulnerable. Our programmes reflect this reality. We'll normally have 75% female and 25% male. AIDS attack these women. Girls may be married as young as 12 or 13 years. Many are not properly developed for childbearing and often have fistula problems. There is also female circumcision in Ethiopia. This is a cruel and barbaric custom that removes all future pleasure from marriage.

We teach against this and wife abuse, which is also a huge problem in Ethiopia. We are advocates for women and their issues. We are especially keen to see changes in the status and perception of girls and women. Ruth constantly preaches about the enormous freedom, equality and dignity that Jesus brought to women. As Galatians says,

You are all children of God through
faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you

who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Few Ethiopian women are educated so we strongly encourage them to learn to read and write and develop themselves by further education. We help them form cooperatives and start small-scale businesses so they may be economically self-reliant. Then their lives and their children's lives will be so much better.

For example, one of our ladies, whose seven-year-old son is in our prevention programme. Her husband left her years ago and her older children are all gone from home. Each morning this poor woman walks to the mountains and collects sticks. She returns with a bundle on her back in the evening. She is in her early forties but looks twenty years older. She sells these sticks for firewood but doesn't make enough money to make ends meet. So she and her boy have to forage in the local university bins for scraps of food that fall from the students' tables.

Collecting forest sticks is backbreaking and dangerous work. The poor women who do this live in constant danger of being raped in the lonely mountains. Often the children they care for are the results of such rapes. It's a vicious circle.

Ruth has a tender heart for vulnerable women and always tries to give them a little money at Christmas, Easter and other holiday times. She may write to her friends to help. She will always light a candle rather than just sit and curse the darkness. Ruth will always do what she can and expect God to give the increase. She is like the child that gave Jesus his dinner of bread and fish to help feed the multitudes.

Ruth gives all. I am very impressed by the dedication and selflessness of this Canadian woman. She lives with the light of eternity in her eyes. She has no treasure on earth. Her riches are in heaven where her heart is. She is full of compassion and mercy.

I often hear her inwardly groan when women and children from some famine area drift past us in their last hours of life or when she sees some emaciated child begging in the streets. The overwhelming needs are far too great for any of us to deal with but it all affects Ruth.

Still she keeps on lighting little candles of hope in people's lives. Keeps pushing back the darkness.

A youngster qualifies as a street child if he or she has lived and slept for more than a year on the streets. There are some children who daily beg on the streets and return home at night to their families. These are not considered real street children. We give priority to fully qualified street children and not just part-time beggars. Many of the street children are orphans from war zones or from some rural area where a famine might be raging. They are helpless and hopeless cases living very close to death.

Over time we've developed a four-phase programme called PRCI.

1. P is for Prevention. At this stage we attempt to spot and stop vulnerable children ending up on the streets.
2. R stands for Rehabilitation. A two-year programme aimed at education and taking responsibility for one's life.

3. C stands for Connection. Reconnection with family or close relatives.
4. I stands for Integration. If connection is not possible at age sixteen we integrate the children back into society.

1. Prevention. In conjunction with the local community we select vulnerable children from needy families through our sponsorship programme. We look at the overall picture and the life history and try to find a sponsor from the West, usually Canada, our sphere of influence. We enrol the child into a normal school.

We buy a uniform; give exercise books and any necessary medication. We also give a small allowance to the family. Indirectly the whole family benefits. They are blessed someone is taking an interest in them and they really make an effort. We are also able to share our faith with them over time. It's a chance for love to work.

2. Rehabilitation. By the time they come to us the children are usually streetwise thieves and liars

addicted to sniffing glue, alcohol and other cheap drugs. They are totally undisciplined staying awake all night and sleeping all day constantly hounded by the police. They beg and steal and eat from the garbage bins. They are abused in all sorts of unimaginable ways. Usually they are sick when we take them in. Sometimes they die. Their life is a struggle for the survival of the fittest in the urban jungle.

Most street children live in mafia-type groups. They have to bring all their begging money to their godfather who divides the spoils amongst them after taking his huge cut. They work under his control and protection. They have their own areas. Traffic lights are very important because they offer momentary access to rich white tourists as they speed past in their First World opulence.

It's hard to rehabilitate street kids. They are normally full of worms, rashes, jigger, addictions and very bad habits. First thing we do is give them a good medical examination. Check for HIV etc. We counsel them. We teach them the Bible and morality. How to take responsibility for themselves and others. Good hygiene. To wash and iron their clothes and make their bed. Wash the dishes. How to be a normal disciplined person.

They have to stay in the centre for one or two years in order to be considered rehabilitated.

Ruth teaches them English. She gives them plenty of good quality time. Most of them respond to love like a rose opening up to the warm sun. Once a year we have a fun-filled Summer Camp. Some street children have become choir members and some Sunday school teachers. Some have become interpreters for foreigners when they come to preach. Many have become a great help to the Lord's work in Ethiopia.

3. Connection. After the rehabilitation centre we move on to the Connection phase. Where possible we locate a parent or close relative and we attempt a reconnection and reconciliation. We'll still offer some small financial support for the child. We prefer to support them in a family as opposed to an institution because sociologically it's not advisable to keep children too long in an institution, as this will make it hard for them to integrate back into the wider society. Our intention is to make them good useful Ethiopian citizens.

4. Integration. If a family can't be found at the connection stage we'll wait until the child is sixteen. We rent homes for groups of them in the community and support them through our sponsorship

programme. They still go to school. Some are now in university. Some have left for further education in Europe. Some are hoping to go to Canada for further study. The Lord has helped us to make a difference in the lives of so many street children. It has been amazing. This work all started because of Ruth's compassion for the poor and needy. I will always remember those two poor blind girls who stood at their urine-soaked spot daily begging.

There is always a healthy tension between the social work and the spiritual work. Yet we must always remember our purpose is to teach and care for the whole person in the hope of bringing them to a saving knowledge of Jesus. It works as long as we give them both social and spiritual input. Then we are completing our mission. Often a church comes into being out of this social work. We start meeting the people's needs and end up with a church. The purpose of my life is to bring people to a knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ. If we only do social work we may only be creating clever devils and sending them to hell on a full stomach.

Western people are always more likely to invest into the social work side than into the spiritual work. To be led by the Spirit is different from being led by compassion. Often the world is led by compassion to

help the Third World. That's why they give money to orphans and starving people. But they will not give to the expansion and advance of the Kingdom of God through evangelism. Even many Christians are like this. Driven by compassion to give to this or that but unwilling to be led by the Spirit to give to the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

In all our decision making we should look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The joy set before Jesus was the people, families and nations that'd come to faith and receive eternal life through his sacrifice.

14.

Regrets? I Have A Few

In Ethiopian culture it's a privilege to be allowed to care for one's extended family. Normally it's grandfathers and grandmothers who raise their grandchildren. They feel so blessed doing this. My wife Hamalemale was happy to raise Nardos because he was a son of her beloved brother.

If I'd given my own children to any of my sisters they'd have been more than happy to raise them. In our culture we have a great sense of extended family and community. Over the years we've looked after many of Hamalemale's extended family especially when I was a pastor with the Baptist Church. Things were good then. We had two cows and plenty of milk. A land flowing with milk. People from Hamalemale's Coptic family were living off me. I was using my Baptist Church salary to feed these Coptic people.

In Ethiopia you can't just reject your people because they believe differently than you. The extended family is very important. Those with money help those who are poor. The strong help the weak. The wise help the foolish. Hamalemale's mother used to live with us. She was a Coptic monk. I had to regularly take her to the Orthodox Church and support her when she wanted to pray and fast. This was my role as her loving son-in-law. This is how I honoured her.

I know some Western missionaries who live like kings and queens in Ethiopia. Not so with Ruth and me. For us it has been very costly to minister in Ethiopia. We've been pushed to the limit many times. Sometimes when these missionaries waved at us from

their plush vehicle as we stood, yet again, beside our old broken-down banger my heart was sorely tested. Being under constant financial pressure was bad enough but perhaps the most difficult part for Ruth was working with the cultural differences. In Ethiopia our whole culture is community based. We share all things in common but Ruth with her Western mindset needed her own space in her own house. She wanted some privacy. She didn't want servants. She complained, What are all these women doing in my home? They're taking over my kitchen.

She didn't want someone coming into her bedroom and making her bed. She wanted her bedroom to be private, wanted to keep it locked. But there is no privacy in Africa. Everyone can use anything. We don't need as much space as Western people. We live in close proximity with one another all the time. We have no secrets. Here are the chickens. There are the children. There is no room for individual space. The in-laws come and stay without warning. The congregation visit at all hours. This can be hard for a Canadian to handle.

The issue of servants caused problems. In our culture someone will come and pour water for your hands before you eat just like Elisha with Elijah. Ruth didn't like this. She said, Kebede, go to the washroom and

wash your own hands. In Ethiopia, when you are old they will wash your feet for you. Ruth also found this difficult. She said, People should wash their own feet. I said, Jesus didn't say people should wash their own feet.

In Canada ideas of individualism and democracy are strong. Sometimes Ruth made the workers sit and eat at the same table as us. I said, Ruth, you are really ruining our culture. You are embarrassing me and embarrassing them. They'd much prefer to eat on their own. This is our culture. She'd said, Your culture is pagan and backward.

After a hard day's ministry in the mission field Ruth would come home exhausted and still insist on cooking for us. I said, Ruth, please give up these Western ideas. Let us help you. Problems arose when groups of my extended family would come to visit. After a visit they might leave one of their children with us. They'd say, Our daughter wants to be looked after by her uncle for a while. We'll come and get her next month. Within a short time five or six of my extended family were living with us. For me it's a joy to have a full house full of activity and life. I love all the commotion and the movement but Ruth found it difficult.

In Ethiopia there is a great expectation from the extended family. I ended up keeping a niece and three of my nephews with us until they finished high school in Addis Ababa. Those guys were a real trial to us. As they got older they were very rebellious. They don't live a holy life. They drank. They smoked. I decided to send two of them to Nairobi Theological School in the hope their attitudes would change. They took the money and spent it on riotous living. Two prodigal sons! When the money ran out they came back and told us they'd been robbed on the way to Nairobi.

I told them, No more money! Enough is enough!

They retaliated by telling the police I was a secret agent from the West. Then one threatened to hang himself outside our church so our ministry would be disgraced. The other nephew was caught vandalising a shop. Lots of trouble.

In the end I thought I might as well also rehabilitate my own extended family alongside the street kids. So we took them back into our home and helped them finish high school. That's the Ethiopian way but often I regret I put Ruth through all that.

In my early days as an evangelist I made the error of giving more time to the ministry than to my family. I made the work of the Lord a more important priority than my family. This was a big mistake. The person who tells you you're wrong is not your enemy. They're often your dearest friend. Hamalemale used to tell me to stay at home and spend more time with her and the children. I regret I didn't listen.

When I was in Bible School a worship leader called Costa Deir came to visit. Costa told us of how he was invited to address world leaders at the United Nations on a certain day. When he checked his diary he realised that same day was his wife's birthday. So he told the United Nations people, I'm sorry but I can't accept your invitation. That day is my wife's birthday. I've promised to do something special with her.

Costa told us, My wife is more important to me than the opportunity to address world leaders. Better I should minister to my own family than the nations of the world. So Costa blessed his wife on her birthday. Afterwards the United Nations people called again. They said, Now that your wife's birthday is over could you please come and speak to us on another day? Because Costa put his wife first the Lord reopened the door of opportunity for him.

Costa said, We should always stick by the principles of God when we set our priorities; God first, family second and ministry third.

God will always honour this because ministry starts from the home. Marriage and family was always God's good plan. Sometimes I feel I haven't been a good role model for my children. They think Christianity is always trouble. They've seen me in and out of prison and in all sorts of bother because of the church. I think they equate Christianity with endless trouble and strife.

When I had my first son Bareket, I prayed, Lord this is the first fruit of my loins. Lord I dedicate my beautiful boy to the work of your ministry. May he be mighty in the land, possess the nations and inherit the gates of his enemies.

Over the years in my own ministry I've produced apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers and elders. So many people come to me and say, Pastor Kebede I have learned so much sitting at your feet. Some folk say, I was converted when you preached. Many people, now in the ministry say, Pastor Kebede do you remember this day, that place, this year? When you preached the Lord healed my heart and released me into ministry. Pastor Kebede I

was a university student when you were in the Baptist church. Usually they even remember the subject I was teaching on. Occasionally the Lord pulls back the veil and allows us to see some of the good fruit of our lives. These are humbling and encouraging times.

But when it comes down to my own family I always think, Did I do enough for my kids? Have I neglected them and their spiritual well-being over the years? Have I really ministered to them? Did I do things wrong? Why are they not serving the Lord full-time like me? Perhaps they have seen and experienced too much pain in our lives together, persecution, imprisonment, suffering, separation, exile and the early death of their lovely mother.

All of this is the wound of my heart. My great sadness. I regret not having spent more time with my children. I really did my best with what I knew but was it enough? I didn't come from a ministry background. I just left all and followed Jesus when he called me. Thank God his word in Joel says, He can restore the years the locusts have eaten. I pray that for my family always. God is no man's debtor. He will care for us.

Some days I have bad memories. Dark storm clouds cover the face of the sun. I remember when we were evangelists in Asbe Teferi. The doctor told us Bareket was suffering from malnutrition. We hadn't any milk for him or any money to buy some. I remember his head so big on his little starving body. I also remember a hut we lived in full of fleas and lice in the cow-dung floor. We couldn't sleep for days until we got enough money for insecticide.

From childhood we Ethiopians are taught that a man has to die for his wife, children, country and religion. Men in our country are breadwinners. If you don't take care of your family you are worthless. The way of the evangelist has been a hard road. When God called me I thought it was natural to leave my wife and children to follow the Lord. That's what I was taught. That was the thinking then.

I was taught the scripture that says, If you don't leave your father and mother and wife and children then you're not fit for the Kingdom of God. Perhaps I took it too literally. I now realize I didn't get the balance right. I'm sure Hamalemale was hurt by it all. She sometimes said, Kebede you're married to the church. You're married to the ministry before you're married to me.

When Hamalemale gave birth to my daughter Sarah, I wasn't there. I'm so sorry about that. My advice to young ministers is they should make their spouse and children a priority before the ministry.

Looking after one's own family and looking after the Kingdom of God are serious callings. We need to get our priorities right, God first, family second and ministry third.

The death of my wife Hamalemale was a terrible blow. After our many years of struggle and separation we were finally all together again and doing well. Then suddenly Hamalemale was gone.

I was crushed to pieces. Bareket, Sarah and Nardos were heartbroken. Felt like, My God, my God why have you forsaken me! Bareket is a good son. An intelligent man. He was very close to his mother. He was devastated. He married a wonderful Ethiopian girl called Kassage who came just before my wife died. She was a great blessing for Bareket. She consoled and strengthened and helped him become established in life.

Nardos is not my natural son but I love him as such. We've had him since he was three months old. He is

the son of Hamalemale's brother who was killed by the communists. His mother had to flee five hundred miles away to her home place in Harare in order to save her life. Nardos is now back in contact with his mom. She came to his wedding.

As a baby Nardos used to wake up at night and bang his head against the wall. He'd come into my room and sleep with me. When he came to Canada I registered him as my son. He has a very humble spirit and a big heart for missions. He is a good preacher. I believe he will go back to Ethiopia as a missionary. He is a wonderful boy who makes the heart of his father happy.

My lovely daughter Sarah was distraught by her mother's death. She was only nineteen at the time. She married soon afterwards but sadly the marriage only lasted a few years. I pray the Lord will give Sarah beauty for ashes and the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness. She has suffered so much.

She has two beautiful children, a girl called Highyat and a boy called Eyob. One day Sarah came to Ethiopia and said, Dad, I am a single mom now and I can't cope any longer. So I want to leave my two children with you. This is not an unusual request for

an Ethiopian to make. Highyat was four years old and Eyob was just two when they came to us.

This was an awkward situation especially for Ruth to whom the rearing of grandchildren is an alien concept. It also came at a time when we were getting older and were just beginning to have a little more time to ourselves. Since coming to Ethiopia Ruth has always been caught up in the middle of my extended family living with us and also looking after twenty street children in our own home. She has always lived in the midst of a big circus of an extended African family all the time. Yet she has managed magnificently rarely complaining.

Perhaps I am partially raising my grandchildren to compensate for the sorrow of not being able to raise my own children. I raise them in a Christian way and if they come and help me in the ministry that might fill the sorrow I have in my heart. Ruth is very good working with our grandchildren. She prays each night with them. She reads stories to them. She teaches them Christian songs and shows them the love of the Lord. They also know so many scriptures off by heart.

My prayer is they will serve God in the future. I hope God may have called them for the ministry. I would

love that but it's not been my intention to force them against their will. The cry of my heart is that all my children and my children's children will serve the Lord. The cry of my heart is that God will bless them to the thousandth generation. Ruth and I love Highyat and Eyob so much. They are a great blessing from God for us.

Although Ruth has no natural children she has been a mother to many. God's ways are not our ways. Everybody calls her Mama Ruth. Looking after widows and orphans in their distress is pure religion. Ruth's life and ministry has been one of pure religion and compassion. It has not always been easy for her but she always strives to do the will of God. She really loves the people of Africa. She is doing a great job.

To me she is a woman sent by God. I give thanks for her daily. I couldn't do it without her. I also really appreciate Ruth's parents, Jack & Betty McAree. They are a lovely Christian couple. They've been generous to us and our work in Ethiopia. They've sacrificially helped us financially. They've bought Bibles for the people and have sponsored our Children's Summer Camp. They have paid our fares to and from Canada each year since we came back to Ethiopia.

And even though they don't always understand the call upon Ruth's life they have remained warm and welcoming. They are marvellous in-laws. Individuals help individuals and change lives for an eternity. It is not just the big institutions that do this. God uses humble and hidden people who through acts of kindness change the history of the world for the better. Jack & Betty McAree are such people.

I regret being such a proud Ethiopian. I always said I'd only listen to God. But God's word says we should also listen to our wives and our fellow believers. Listen to your family. Listen to your wife. Listen to those God has given oversight to. God says we should listen and live considerately with our wives so our prayers may not be hindered.

My proud independent attitude often caused trouble for the Church leadership. My elders would call me. They'd say, Kebede we want you to be in church at such and such a time. We would like you to do this for us. I told them, Go away from me. I am the servant of the Lord. I am not your servant. I have to hear from the Lord. Now I realise this was spiritual pride on my part. If one's relationship with men is not right then one's relationship with God will not be right.

The word of God says if you don't love a person whom you can see how can you love God whom you cannot see. My old teacher Huxley used to say, The cross is vertical and horizontal. The vertical connects us with God. The horizontal connects us with men. When the cross is properly balanced it always brings peace.

We can't get the time back. Hebrews 11 says, Some have suffered for the Lord unto death. They had been wearing the skins of goats and wandering from place to place. This world does not belong to them. They have suffered. This world did not belong to us. And we suffered. We suffered and we wandered from place to place. I didn't want to have a house. I didn't want to have a car.

But over time God has shown me I need all these things to be able to do the work of the ministry. I didn't even believe that I should give a good education to my children.

I was very stubborn. It was hard for people to work with me. I was the only boy in my family. My father brought me up to be a warrior and a patriot. He told me I had to be strong. He taught me how to ride a horse, how to swim and how to hunt and shoot lions. He taught me to fight and fear no one. He told me

about him being a soldier in the Second World War when Haile Selassie absconded to England. He told of how he was jailed for fighting against Haile Selassie on his return to Ethiopia.

Dad's talk engendered in me a defiant mistrust of the establishment. I was a fighter all my life until I accepted Jesus as my saviour. Even then I was still a warrior, independent and stubborn. I thought I could get everything by fighting. It took me a long time to realise we don't get all we want by arguing.

At school I'd fight with my teachers. I mobilised fellow students to run riot against our teachers. I was expelled from school many times but Dad always got me reinstated. Dad taught me to be fearless and take risks. Taught me that nothing would defeat me. Now I realise an overconfident attitude can also be dangerous causing one to be foolhardy in life. I think perhaps this is a particularly Ethiopian trait for during the war some Ethiopians would come against a tank armed only with a sword. The successful ones would kill the driver by sticking the sword down into his head. They didn't calculate the risk. They were fearless foolhardy warriors. Bravery is valued in Ethiopia. Often Ethiopians don't think of the repercussions of their actions.

My early education was jeopardised because I was a fighter. As a young evangelist I still had this fighting spirit. When the elders and the pastors tried to correct me I wouldn't listen. I was a strong free spirit. Nowadays I'm much better. By God's grace I now have the patience of five elephants.

I heard a story once. A pastor was on his deathbed. His wife asked him, Husband what should I write on your tombstone? He said, If you really believe it and can say it honestly I would like you to engrave, *Truly a man of God*. That will be enough for me.

For a minister to honestly gain this testimony from his wife and children is not easy. Our family knows our true spirituality. If our wives believe we are spiritual men then we can win the whole world. Then people will say he is a true man of God. Our family knows our weaknesses. They know our ups and downs. They know who we really are. Other people only see the superficial. The pastor's wife prayed hard about this request.

She remembered all the bad and foolish things he'd said and done over their many years together. But at the end of the day she remembered all the good things he had done. She remembered all he had suffered and

sacrificed to follow Jesus. So when he died she had the stonemason engrave, *Truly a man of God*.

That's the affirmation I desire from Ruth if I die before her. Women normally think the husband will go before them. Hamalemale used to assume that. She'd say, Kebede if you die you have to leave money for your children. But in the end she went before me.

Being a fighter has caused much trouble in my Christian walk. I was like a son of thunder always wanting to bring fire from heaven and consume my enemies. 1st Corinthians 13 speaks about Christian ministry,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not

boast, it is not proud. It is not rude,
it is not self-seeking, it is not easily
angered, it keeps no record of
wrongs. Love does not delight in
evil but rejoices with the truth. It
always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres.
Love never fails.

Love is the main thing. God is love. As I grow older I realise success is not measured in earthly terms, a big house, limousine, money, or a successful mega-church. We need to keep our eyes on eternity. True success will only be measured when we appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3 tells us, For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss.

15.

Give Me This Mountain

In Ezekiel 16 God said to Israel;

Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths.

No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, Live! I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels.

These scriptures remind me of Ouonake who used to come to our Addis Ababa church. Ouonake, from a pagan background, was born with a cleft palate. When the community leader heard of his defect he said, This boy is cursed. Let him die. If he lives then all of the people will be cursed. The name Ouonake means, *Let him die*. So they broke through the back wall of Ouonake's family home and carried the helpless baby out. Their superstitions wouldn't allow him to be brought through the front door. They threw him onto the village dunghill.

Ouonake's barren aunt heard about this. She secretly rescued him and raised him as her own child. Years later Ouonake became a Christian and then a pastor. Now he is a faithful and profitable servant of Christ with a big heart for the poor. Surely we should be like God and Ouonake's aunt. We should bravely rescue the unloved and the perishing. No one had pity on Israel who like baby Ouonake was despised and rejected. But God cared. He had compassion. He saw. I often think it's been the same for me. If God hadn't saved me when he did I'd have lived a wasted life. I'd have died young or maybe have killed somebody and ended up dying alone in jail.

But one Sunday nearly fifty years ago I went to watch a soccer match. I was standing at a crossroads wondering which way to go when I heard some young women singing on the street. I drew closer.

A passer-by asked one of the girls, Is that a Bible you are holding?

She said, Yes it is.

He said, Are you missionaries or Pentes or what?

We are Christians.

Are you going to teach me?

She said, God is going to teach you.

That remark touched my heart. God is going to teach you. I followed them back to a small church. The preacher was talking about the rich young ruler who asked Jesus, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus said, You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother. The rich young man said, All these I have kept since I was a boy. Jesus looked at him and loved him. Then Jesus said, One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. But Jesus' love was not enough for this rich young man who became sad because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus lovingly looking at him turned to his disciples and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!

The preacher then read from Genesis 12, where God told Abraham to leave his country, his people and his father's household and go to the land that God would show him. Unlike the rich young ruler Abraham obeyed instantly and left everything to follow God not knowing where he was going.

As I listened to the preacher my heart was strangely warmed. I surrendered my whole life to God. We were singing, I have decided to follow Jesus. I can still hear those words tumbling down the years,

I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
No Turning back, No Turning back

The cross before me
The world behind me
The cross before me
The world behind me
No Turning back, No Turning back

I was working as a police journalist at the time. I never returned to that job. Not even to collect my salary. I took Jesus at his word and left all to follow him. Like St. Paul I can honestly say I have been made a spectacle to angels and men.

I have been a fool for Christ, weak and dishonoured!
I have been hungry and thirsty, in rags, brutally
treated, homeless, exiled, cursed, persecuted,
slandered and imprisoned. I have been under great
pressure beyond my ability to endure. I have often
felt the sentence of death. I have worked with my
own hands to support myself and others. I have often
despaired of life.

But I have also seen the Kingdom come. I have seen
the sick healed. I have seen demons cast out. I have
seen countless people like Ouonake raised from
Satan's dunghill of death and given glorious new life
in Christ. And although I have lost much including
my first wife Hamalemale I have never once regretted
the decision I made that day of the missed soccer
match. God had a much greater goal for me.

He has also a great plan for your life and for the
generations after you. If you haven't already done so
why not be like Abraham and leave all to follow
God's way. It'll be the greatest adventure of your life
and you'll never regret it. Believe me Jesus is looking
at you right now with love in his eyes awaiting your
response. Will you leave all to follow Jesus?

Please say, Yes!

Dad once told me, When you grab hold of a leopard's tail you can't let it go for if you do it will turn and tear you to pieces. When Dad was a youth he looked after the cattle in the compound. There was a little tower on which the night watchman sat. One night Dad was sleeping on duty when a leopard crept in and seized a goat. The squeals of the goat awakened Dad. He jumped up, took his club and chased after the leopard that was making slow progress because of the goat in its mouth.

Just before the leopard reached the safety of the bush Dad caught up with it, grabbed it by the tail and started clubbing its head. The rest of the family awakened by the commotion came searching with burning torches. They saw the leopard's footprints and feared the worst. Oh my poor Degu, wailed his mom, A leopard has eaten my son.

But Dad was not eaten. He'd smashed the leopard's skull and rescued the goat. When they found Dad alive they were overjoyed. Dad skinned the leopard and presented it to his father. His father said, My son you are a true Ethiopian hero. You are now a pure man. You have defeated the leopard. Instead of the leopard eating you, you shall eat this goat all by yourself. You deserve it.

Grandfather was so proud of his brave son. He had the leopard skin hung on the family wall. Dad's exploit was the talk of the whole district. So like my father, who grabbed the leopard by the tail, I can't let go of God's call upon my life. I too must be brave and endure to the end. Once I have started I must finish and never give up.

The grace of God has kept me alive for over forty years and I'm still going strong. I'm still as vigorous and as ready for battle as I was forty years ago. Like Caleb I can say, Lord give me this mountain you have promised and I will take it full. God is still with me. Oh praise the Lord. I have his wonderful Holy Spirit.

I don't know what the future holds but I know there's a big harvest coming. I can see a great harvest of souls for Ethiopia. I can see remarkable things coming in keeping with the prophecies once spoken over me. I have no story of my own. I am nothing. I am nobody.

My story is a story of the mercy of Almighty God working in a poor man's life. Oh Lord, thank you for keeping me and enabling me to survive and to pass through all these hurdles of life. I give all the glory to Jesus!