

Chapter 1

Come of age

There is a word whose full meaning I never knew. I really do understand it implicitly now. It is brevity; particularly the brevity of life. I looked up the dictionary definition after my wife Jill explained to me what it means. The *New Collins Concise Dictionary* says that the word “brevity” means a short duration. It comes from the word “brief”, so in other words, the briefness of life.

I have, in the last three weeks, come to the full realization of the meaning of the words “brevity of life”. I’m sixty-one years old as I write this book and it’s taken me sixty-one years to come of age. It’s a funny thing, you can go on preaching and teaching about the importance of life, tell your children, your congregation, your friends, the world, but unless the Holy Spirit reveals it to you in a very drastic way, you never really understand what it means when you hear that life is but a vapour. It’s like the grass of the field. It’s here today but gone tomorrow. Especially when you are a young person, you think you’re going to live forever. It really saddens my heart more and more each day as it seems as if there are more young people dying than older people, especially in our beloved continent of Africa.

David Kain is an old gentleman I respect immensely. I remember well the day that he remarried. His first wife had passed on and he was well into his eighties. He invited me to his wedding. I purposely arrived at the wedding a little bit late, hoping to sneak into the back and sit there and

just be a part of the celebration, which was held on the premises of African Enterprise. It was a huge turnout of people. His sons were there, some of them preachers of the Word themselves.

As I walked in, he was standing at the altar, about to make his vows. He gave me the thumbs up, and there was a twinkle in his eye. The ushers came and literally arrested Jill and me, marched us right up to the front, in front of everybody, to sit in the front row. He had told me a week or two before that he wanted me to come to his wedding. And, if the Lord laid a Word on my heart, just to share it with the congregation... That was all he said.

Jill was not amused at all, because she thought I'd set this thing up. I hadn't. I had tried to play it really low-key. So there we were, sitting in the front row next to all the family and the many visiting ministers. He's a very popular man. His son Russell, who was conducting the service, said, "We're now going to call upon Angus Buchan to bring the message." One thing I learned many years ago was always to carry a sermon in your top pocket. I had to get up and bring the full message!

David Kain is a man who has come of age. He and his dear wife Winks enjoy life to the full. They are both well into their eighties and probably have more life in them than most youngsters under the age of twenty-one. They appreciate every day and I'm sure they enjoy every sunrise and every sunset.

David came out to the farm to encourage me once to keep on preaching the Gospel for Jesus. He said something that I've never forgotten. He said, "Angus, I can't go down the well any more but I can hold the rope." In other words, even as I have to keep going down the well, he can stabilize and

assist me by holding the rope at the top. That's a statement made by a man who has come of age. That's why God has blessed him so much and is still using him so powerfully in his day-to-day living.

I think that many of us, when we were younger, thought that we'd come of age, only to realize at a much later date – for me, at the age of sixty-one – that we've only now come of age.

I love going to Israel. One of my favourite places there is Peter's Landing. It's the place where nothing has changed. It was from the shores of Lake Galilee that Jesus conducted most of His ministry, a place called Tabgha, where seven springs come out of the ground and flow into the lake at that spot. Being a farmer and a naturalist, I can understand why the fisherman fished that area, because all the nutrients out of the ground and all the food sources would have flowed into the lake right there.

I think of Simon Peter, the big fisherman, the son of John. After the crucifixion the disciples had all scattered and basically betrayed the Lord through fear. They were sorely distressed because their hero, their champion who was going to deliver them from the oppressors – the Romans – had been killed. They had lost hope and had gone back to doing the only thing they knew how: fishing. They were fishermen by trade.

Peter's Landing is where Jesus stood on the steps on the Sunday morning following the crucifixion, and they are still there, cut into rock. I've been there. I got very emotionally involved because I believe the Lord challenged me in my heart in that same place.

Jesus stood on the steps and shouted out to the men who were fishing maybe fifty metres off the shore. I can

only assume it would have been a misty morning, because they obviously didn't see the Lord's face or His silhouette very clearly. They heard the voice shout out (John 21:5): "Boys, have you caught anything?"

"No."

"Throw your nets on the other side."

They obeyed, and caught one hundred and fifty-three large fish. Those tilapia are beautiful fish. They're a type of bream and have a beautiful white flesh. I've eaten them myself.

John recognized Jesus and said, "That's the Lord!"

The Bible says that at that moment Simon Peter, the big fisherman, took off over the edge of the boat, half putting on his clothes. He must have half run, half swum to the edge of the lake. There was Jesus!

He had prepared breakfast for them, like He always did. He had baked fresh bread and roasted some fish. He always took care of all of their needs. And He still does.

When they'd finished eating, Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Feed My sheep."

He asked this three times. I think Peter must have been sorely vexed and troubled by the third time. I can imagine he was weeping. He'd also denied the Lord three times. He said, "Lord, You know everything."

Jesus said, "Feed My sheep."

I firmly believe that Peter, the big fisherman, had come of age at that moment, because his life was totally transformed. Before then he'd been the braggart. He'd been the one who said to the Lord, "I'll die for You!" He was the leader of the pack. He had the big mouth. He was probably

the hard-drinking, rough and tough man.

But after he had let the Lord down so badly by denying Him three times, he was a changed man. After Peter was baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, his life took on a totally different outlook. He then went on to preach his first sermon and three thousand souls came to Christ that day. Jesus Christ was the Head of the church but Peter became the leader.

Legend tells us that he was eventually caught in Rome and crucified. This is a man who could not even own up to being an associate of Jesus Christ before he'd come of age. He asked to be crucified upside down because, he said, "I'm not worthy to die like my Saviour." They crucified his wife before him. While she was dying, he kept saying to her, "Remember the Lord." Peter had come of age.

We need to come of age, because there's no time left for fooling around. David Kain said he can't go down the well any more but he can hold the rope. He has come of age.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was regarded by the Baptists as the Prince of Preachers. When he was twenty-one years old the Baptists built the London Tabernacle for him. It could seat ten thousand people. A man who, though uneducated – he had never been to Bible College – wrote more Christian books than any other man, ever. Yet, when he was in his late fifties and got sick, Spurgeon said, "By attempting to do less, I hope to achieve more."

There comes a time in every person's life when we have to face up to facts and realize that we are not here forever, that while we are here we have to do something constructive with our lives. I thank God for the turmoil, the pain and the tribulation I went through a short while ago, because it made me come of age. The tragedy is that some people

never come of age. My dear friend reading this book, I hope you are not one of them.

I heard of a man who was being divorced for the sixth time. As he came out of court, he was overheard to say, "Well, I'm so sorry. She tried her best to please me but she just couldn't quite get it right." Have you ever heard anything as childish as that? A man who had already had five wives, who was getting divorced for the sixth time, and who was still saying, "She tried so hard, but she couldn't make me happy." It sounds like a two-year-old speaking, not a fully-grown man.

There are some men who have so much in terms of finance, reputation and power, and yet they will not share it with anybody. God gave me a picture one day of a two-year-old little boy sitting on a carpet surrounded by hundreds of toys that he could never play with in a year. Another little boy came to visit him and he would not let him play with one toy. I have a grandson of that age and I thank the Lord that he's not like that.

Such a childish attitude; and yet how many times haven't we seen grown-ups act the very same way? A man who has so much money that if he were to live three lifetimes he would never spend it all, yet he will not give it to anybody, will not help anybody. Of course, he is the loser in the end.

A few weeks ago I had the most amazing experience of my entire life to date. Every time God does something in my life I say, "Well, Lord, You can't do better than this." Yet He does.

Six years ago, God called me to cancel all my preaching appointments, all my evangelistic outreaches and to concentrate on mentoring young men. He showed me that there are so few spiritual fathers in this nation, and indeed

in the world, at this time. I was up at the Mkuze Game Reserve in Northern Zululand, having a rest with my wife, Jill. God rebuked me very severely, saying, “You have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4). God was saying to me that he wanted me to get back to my first love. The passage goes on: “remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place” (verse 5). The lampstand means light, so, light being the Holy Spirit in my life, I knew exactly what that meant.

I duly went back and did what God had told me. The first miracle was that no one was angry with me, although some of these men had booked me a year, two years before. They had even begun some of the advertising for the meetings. But one thing I realized is that when you do something God’s way, it always works out.

I started out at that stage, in 2004, with the first men’s conference. Two hundred and forty men came, which was a huge miracle for us because we did no advertising. We sent out one e-mail letter, and that’s what happened. The next year six hundred men attended; then the numbers increased to one thousand and sixty; then to seven thousand, four hundred; then to sixty thousand plus; and then to one hundred and fifty thousand plus men – between one hundred and fifty thousand and two hundred thousand men – which was the hugest event I’ve ever addressed. This wasn’t just for one meeting; it was for a complete weekend.

Although it was due to start on the Friday evening, we’d opened the gates on the Monday before so that there wouldn’t be such traffic congestion. By the Thursday we already had over a hundred thousand men camping.

It was the greatest moment of my life. In preparation, we

had hired the biggest platform we could find. The pylons reached eight storeys high. We had big screens where we could be clearly seen from two hundred and forty metres away. The screens were not only around the stage but also a hundred metres out from the stage so that the next group of men could also see everything happening. It was a most amazing happening.

Eight kilometres of 15 cm (six-inch) piping was put in the ground for water, showers and toilets. Twenty-three thousand toilets were built especially for the event. Three hundred and forty thousand litres of water an hour were needed for the men to just shower.

We had an earth-moving company that was on the farm for a solid month just building roads. I remember a few years back when, as a young farmer, I would almost have had a nightmare hiring one grader for an hour because of the cost. Here we had graders, back actors, bulldozers, cranes, compactors and JCE riggers literally resident on the farm for a month. They built proper hardened district roads right through the three farms to accommodate the coaches coming from Cape Town, Johannesburg and all over Southern Africa.

Six months before the conference, Joe Niemand, one of my spiritual sons, who has become an amazing Gospel singer for Christ, flew down especially from Johannesburg to tell me that he had been fasting and praying, and God had showed him that the glory of God was going to come down on this particular Mighty Men Conference, the sixth conference we were going to host in the sixth consecutive year. He was weeping when he told me. We just sat at the little airport in Pietermaritzburg for a couple of hours, and then he caught the plane straight back to Johannesburg.

He wrote a special CD, which was ready for the conference. It had taken him twenty-eight days to make, instead of his customary three years for a CD. A full string orchestra and three choirs were employed. That music is truly an amazing soundtrack which God made through this young man Joe Niemand.

He said that the glory of God was going to come down and I agreed with that. We didn't know how. We didn't know whether it was going to come through the music, whether it was going to come through the camp-fires at night, or whether it was going to come through the preaching, but we knew that the glory of the Lord was going to come down. It was so exciting!

From a week before the conference began, I took my food and my Bible, got in a car, and literally went and hid in a forest every morning for a solid week, spending time waiting before God, weeping, laughing, crying out to God, seeking God's face, not even so much in preparing the messages as in preparing my heart. Then, as the end of the week approached, I started hearing the echo through the forest of the cars, the jeeps, the 4x4's, the caravans, tents, trucks and pantechnicons pulling onto the farms every day. It was so exciting!

It was a time when I went through my personal Gethsemane – my olive press. Remember, Gethsemane was where Jesus spent the night before the high priest's soldiers arrested Him.

We had just gone through Easter a couple of weeks before that. I had preached at home, which I very rarely do. I haven't preached there for ages. I spoke to young Marc Porée, also one of my sons in the Lord and the pastor at our church (which is doing so well), and his wife Mandy, and

said: "I really feel that I need to bring the message on Good Friday." I really felt very strongly about it. To me, that is the most important day in the Christian calendar.

That morning I was very emotional, as were the congregation, when I shared what God had laid on my heart. God had impressed upon me that the hardest thing that Jesus ever had to do was not so much the flogging, or even the crucifixion. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane, because, at that time, He could still have pulled out! He even prayed, "Father... not My will, but Yours, be done," (Luke 22:42) when He had to drink of the cup of suffering, the cup of pain. However, once He'd made His decision, once He'd made up His mind, there was no turning back and He went through with it. Up to that time, though, He could have pulled out.

That's exactly where I was in that forest. On the Monday it started raining. Remember, this whole event was open air. It wasn't just Shalom Ministries who were involved; it was also the young farmers who had put all their money, all their faith into this project, who were believing God for the men to arrive and for the weather to hold. On the Monday before the conference began, it was pouring with rain and the temperature plummeted right down to five degrees. Jill and I were jogging one morning and there was what felt like sleet against our faces.

It was almost like everything was going wrong. The bookings for the registrations for the camping were done with *iTicket* and they had a special system whereby they would call me every day on our cellphones to tell me how many men had booked in. The men were just not booking in. I think we had barely fifty thousand bookings, and we were catering for two hundred thousand men. I really

experienced just a very small – a very, very, small – part of what Jesus must have gone through in the Garden of Gethsemane. Every time He wanted the disciples to help Him, they were sleeping.

While I was in that forest, the devil was saying to me very clearly and distinctly, “This time I’m going to expose you for the fraud that you are. This time you are going to fall. This time Jesus can’t help you. This time you’ve committed yourself and you are going to slip right into a lake of fire.” Remember, the men had laid out money, they had given out the concession for food to a group of Christian men, who had by faith brought in thousands and thousands of rands worth of food to be sold at the event, and the news media had been informed. I had the biggest wrestling match of my life in that forest. But I never thought about pulling out, because I couldn’t. We were totally committed.

On the Friday there was a breakthrough. The men were coming in by the thousands. By Friday night we had well over a hundred and fifty thousand men already camping there, camping nearby at campsites, on other farms, in school hostels, in hotels, in bed-and-breakfasts. It was absolutely amazing. Men came from all over the world. There were aeroplanes flying in from everywhere. More than eight helicopters were there that weekend.

Friday night came and indeed the atmosphere was electric. They had made a special walkway for me to get from the house onto the platform without being thronged by all the well-wishers. We had ushers who went with us, good men who escorted me to each meeting. Everybody was ecstatic. Everybody was expecting God to do something special.

Again, Jesus had made a decision at Gethsemane. He

was going to go through with it. If we backtrack just a few days, remember when Jesus came into Jerusalem they were waving palm leaves in front of that little donkey and throwing their garments and robes on the road in front of Him. Everyone was shouting out, "Hallelujah; Glory to God in the highest!" It was a time of celebration.

We really felt that. That Friday night was electric. Everything worked well. The sound system was impeccable. The lighting was fantastic. The *God Channel* had agreed to televise all four services – Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday night and Sunday morning – live to the whole world. Something I never even dreamed would have happened ten years ago.

I got up, preached my heart out that night, and then saw something I've never seen thus far in my life before. When I prayed for a recommitment, every one stood to their feet as one man, like a soldier in a regiment, and repented before God. I asked the question: "If this is the first time in your life that you have publicly accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, please, will you raise your hand?" Over a third of those men raised their hands.

I've been preaching the Gospel for thirty years. Never in my life have I ever seen anything like that. It was absolutely mind-blowing what God did that night. There was weeping. We prayed for the sick – and as I looked out over the sea of faces, the crowds literally disappeared from sight. It was dark at night but there were lights, banks of lights. You just saw men, and men, and men, and men, going right into the distance.

That night was the most amazing night and I couldn't sleep. Maybe many men didn't sleep, because it was so exciting. I couldn't wait for the next morning. But that

night I came down with a fever. I was lying there in a pool of perspiration. Jill was concerned for me. I asked her to pray for me and by the morning the fever had left me.

I got ready, I had my sword (my Word of God), my black hat, the cowboy boots that I'd been given as a beautiful gift by the men of Australia at the beginning of their Men's Conference just a few weeks before, I put my western shirt on, and off we went. It was absolutely thrilling to see the joy and the happiness in men's faces; definitely a "God time".

I got up and preached that morning to the "sons of promise" on: How do you get more faith? I'll never forget it. How could I? There were three main points: Number one, by spending time in the Word; number two, by being prepared to go through hardship, tribulation, if necessary, to grow. Little did I know what was going to happen literally an hour later! And number three, to know Him more personally and to know the person of Jesus Christ.

When I'd finished, we again saw multitudes of men responding to the Gospel; we saw joy, we saw weeping. I went down the stairs, off this huge platform. Huge – sixty metres by sixty metres! Underneath the platform they had cordoned off a special area with double-thick shade cloth drawn around the poles for a bit of privacy, a place where we could just wait and rest before preaching.

I'd asked some visitors, thirty-three of them to be exact, who had come just for that weekend all the way from Australia, the other side of the world, to come and meet me underneath the platform so that I could have a word of prayer with them for a few minutes, and to say thank you for coming all that way. They came in. I was hot. It was very, very hot at that time and there wasn't very much air inside the enclosure. It wasn't just a prayer the men wanted; they

wanted me to anoint them, they wanted the mantle that God had given to me, just like Elisha asked Elijah for the mantle. They were weeping, as I was. It was an emotional time.

I finished praying for each one and said, "Chaps, I've got to go now, because I've got to get ready for the afternoon message." I started to walk out of that room and suddenly felt light-headed. At that very moment Andy, my oldest son, had just come off the platform, down the same steps. They'd played the last song before the men left to go to their camps for lunch, and as he came down the steps, I walked out of the room and collapsed. He caught me in his arms. He thought that I was dying. My eyes rolled back and I didn't know where I was.

When I came to, I was perspiring profusely. I was nauseous, I was sick; I didn't know what had happened. I thought maybe I'd just passed out. They had called in doctors, and I could see that they were very worried. There was a young Zulu doctor, Dr Thobeko Ntuli – a wonderful young man of God and a member of our congregation – and Dr Visser, another wonderful man of God all the way from Tzaneen right up on the South African/Zimbabwean border, who had come to my aid. Not to mention the paramedics, including Hans Hartmann. They gave me oxygen, stabilized me for the trip and put me in the car. I took my mask off and shouted, "Amen! I'll see you guys at five o'clock!"

With that, they took me off to my house, about four hundred metres away. I asked Andy to go ahead and just prepare Jill so that she wouldn't get a fright, to tell her that I'd just fainted but that I'd be fine. I walked down the path to the little garden gate at the back and sat down. She

brought me a cup of tea. I drank half the cup and collapsed a second time. This time I wasn't coming around. I lay on the grass.

My dear friend, literally one half-hour before that, I was standing on the platform speaking, preaching my heart out, the thing I love the most, to the biggest crowd of men I've ever seen in the world. Now I was lying on the grass like a helpless, newborn babe, unable to do anything but fully conscious of what was happening around me. My eyes were wide open and I could see everything. I could hear everything, but I couldn't do anything for myself.

My dear wife, my best friend whom I love so dearly, came and took hold of my hand. I'm so proud of her! She didn't break down, she didn't become hysterical. On the contrary, she just kept reassuring me. The love that I experienced from my family, from my children, Andy, Rochelle, Fergie, Robyn, Jilly, Greg, Dougal and, later on, Lindy and Ashleigh, who weren't there at the time but came to the hospital – I've never experienced anything like it before in my life.

I was lying on that grass. The men were called straight back from their tents and about two hundred thousand men returned. They'd been told that I'd collapsed and had had a possible heart attack, and they were ready to pray. I heard men singing. I heard men weeping. I heard men shouting: "Amen! Don't worry Angus; God's going to do it!" Thousands upon thousands...

They rigged up a makeshift field hospital right there on the grass and began to monitor my heart, my blood pressure, only to see it start slipping away. In desperation they took raw adrenaline and pumped it into my veins, and it seemed to bring me back again. Then it happened a second time.

In the meantime they'd ordered a helicopter from

Durban, which is two hours' drive by car away from the farm. It landed literally outside our garden. The paramedics – amazing men and women of God, angels, in fact – cut right through the fence of the garden, brought the stretcher in, put me on it, strapped me down, and talked me right through everything.

By this time, my family was very concerned. They thought I was dying, and I think I was. I think I was standing at the Gates of Glory. I want to say to you, to any believer who has any fear of death: Do not be afraid. For a believer, when you die there is no pain. I experienced no pain whatsoever, only peace.

They put me in the helicopter. It took them fifteen minutes to fly me from the farm to the actual hospital in the city. As that helicopter took off, I'll never forget stretching my head up, trying to look at the men, giving them the thumbs up, and seeing thousands and thousands of men weeping and praying, with their hands raised up towards the red helicopter that was airlifting me to hospital. I'll never forget that sight as long as I live.

I firmly believe with all of my heart that in the fifteen minutes it took from the time I left my little house on the farm to the time that I touched down at the helicopter pad in the hospital grounds at Medi-City in Pietermaritzburg, the Lord Jesus Christ healed me miraculously because of the effective, fervent prayers of righteous men and women, boys and girls, all over the world (James 5:16).

At the hospital they put me on a stretcher. That was the time when I felt the most nauseous, because they took that stretcher flat out through the corridor. All I could see was the ceiling spinning past me. Then they brought me into the ICU ward, where I was attended by wonderful nursing sisters.

The cardiologist, the specialist, Dr Baig, is a wonderful man who had a tremendous presence of peace about him. He asked me questions:

“Is there any pain?”

“What did you feel?”

I answered them. I explained there was no pain.

He did tests on those big screens and said, “There’s nothing here. I can’t see any damage to your heart.”

He then got me onto a treadmill. He had me running, walking on an incline treadmill for maybe ten or fifteen minutes. He said, “There’s nothing wrong with you whatsoever! I’m going to do some blood tests and you can go back to the farm.”

While I was in the hospital, the meetings on the farm had not stopped, and I thank God for that. My son Andy, who was doing the praise and worship, got up on the platform and said, “Dad’s not here. But we didn’t come here to listen to Dad; we came to hear from God, so we’re going to carry on.” They had a praise and worship evening, which I believe was unbelievable. Many men had a complete turnaround in their lives that night.

That evening they took me back home to the farm. Jill was just so grateful to God that her husband had come back, because a lot of them didn’t think they’d see me again when the helicopter took off. I said to my family that I wanted to preach the next morning. My children asked me very seriously, “Please don’t do it; just rest. You’ve had a heart attack, maybe two.”

I said, “Well, I must just greet the people.”

The next morning the service was due to start at nine o’clock. At half past eight I was driven in a car (my family would not allow me to walk!) to the platform. Again, I’ve

never experienced anything like that in my life; a human tunnel of men and young boys clapping, whistling, shouting and chanting the name “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!” and slapping the car, shaking my hand through the window; some weeping; others laughing, pleased to see me back.

I went inside and underneath the platform, the same place where I’d collapsed the first time. Andy said to me, “Dad, get up on the platform, say goodbye to the guys, five minutes. Come down and then we’ll start the service.”

I said, “No, son, you’ve got it wrong. You get up on the platform, you lead them in the praise and worship, you can have a testimony from the doctor, then Joe is going to sing his song, and then I’ll preach.”

I preached for twenty to twenty-five minutes, from my heart. I told the two hundred thousand men, women and children – because women and children, as usual, joined the men on the Sunday morning – that I have come of age and that for the first time in my life I’ve realized what the brevity, the briefness, of life means. I was very emotional, weeping. I said, “God has given me a second chance.” I remember using the Scripture: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24).

I told them that this is not the time to have grievances against your family, or your fellowman. I told them how, right at the end of the last chapter of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, I had written in the margin: “Keep short accounts with God and with man, for the time is now very short.” That morning we all got on our knees on the grass and we prayed together. That was a turning point in my life.

Afterwards, I went home. There was a tremendous sense of peace at Shalom as the men began leaving, trekking their

way back home, some to the Karoo, others to the big cities, some to the Cape, others to the maize-growing area of North West Province, many to KwaZulu-Natal, and all over. Black, white, coloured and Indian, all going back to take peace with them; to speak to their wives and tell them that they love them – unconditionally; to ask forgiveness; to do the “kneeling thing”; to ask their wives to give them a second chance; and to tell their children how much they love them. We’ve been inundated with phone calls and e-mails and letters. Thousands upon thousands of lives changed forever, because men of promise have come of age.

Hans Hartmann, one of the paramedics attending to me, has given his testimony, which I want to share with you here:

Impressions of a Medic MMC 09 – 28 April 2009

Three months ago, the deal was finalized. I would supply the medical cover at this year’s event. I was competing against a rival company and was prepared to equal their quote for three vehicles on site. I would promise three vehicles, but would throw in a field hospital; two quads and ten outstations, at the same price. These would be manned from Friday morning to Sunday night. Having done the event last year, I knew what I was letting myself in for. After all, last year we had 65,000 men attending, and we coped with them – with our ten medics, all volunteers. With the 200,000 expected, we would have many more volunteers, and the money we would be paid would cover our disposables and travelling expenses, as well as our

meals. I planned to discount whatever we did not spend, as this was an event I would not do for money...

Three days to go. I have not slept very well for the last three weeks. I have searched high and low for medics, but have only three; myself and one ambulance crew that I am standing down from my operations. I phone my stepson, who is one of the ambulance staff, and plead with him to find me more staff. Even the medics who attended last year have pulled out. I have phoned my competitors and asked them to take over the event – assuring them that the exposure they will get far exceeds the little money they will get paid. Again I am turned down.

Then I receive an SMS from my stepson:

“DEPEND ON IT – GOD KEEPS HIS WORD. DOUBT IS A DEMONIC DETOUR. WHEN YOU GET TO WHERE GOD WANTS YOU TO BE, HIS PROVISION WILL ALREADY BE IN PLACE. NO TURNING BACK.”

OK, but I have already prayed and asked... I am now in panic mode, and I change my requirements from Christian male volunteers to Christian male medics who will be paid, and eventually to any male medic who is prepared to work for money. This will be financial ruin, but I no longer care.

One day to go. Thursday morning I receive a message that my North Coast manager has managed to find some medics, as has someone in Durban, and five are available in Pietermaritzburg. I proceed to Mighty Men to set up the field hospital for Friday morning. By sunset the first patients arrive, even though we are only on duty from Friday. Already 60,000 men are on site. My ambulance

is dispatched immediately to cover the event during the night, and by sunrise six patients have been treated, all minor ailments.

Friday morning dawns, without any sleep. Two medics from Durban do not show up, two from North Coast and three from Pietermaritzburg. I am left with twenty. Not quite what I was hoping for, but manageable all the same. I hate myself for doubting in the first place. However, I am the only paramedic, and should we have to move a serious patient, the event will be left with nothing but ambulance staff. It will just have to do!

By 10 am the patients are starting to arrive: flu, runny tummy, asthma, allergy – silly things that mean a lot to the patient, but are not what we are trained for. We need the serious stuff to make our life worthwhile... A provincial ambulance response vehicle pulls up with a doctor, required by Disaster Management to be in the OPS Centre in case of disaster. This centre is based about ten metres from our field hospital. The doctor strolls in and introduces himself in a heavy Zulu accent. Great, I think, just what I need, an intern who is forced to do his work at a provincial ambulance service. He promptly announces to the organizers and police manning the OPS Centre that should they require him, he will be at the field hospital, and promptly starts to scratch through our equipment. Anyway, I am too busy arranging medics at the outstations to worry about him at this stage.

By the time I have everyone arranged, stations worked out, instructions given, I become aware that the doctor is the only one in the tent treating patients. I wander across for a closer look and discover that he is not just handing out the few medications we have,

but is actually examining the patients with their aches and pains, and actually treating them. "This simply won't do," he announces, and drives off to Greytown and returns shortly afterwards with half the hospital pharmacy, handing out antibiotics and medications that you need to study at least seven years just to pronounce. Wow, now this is what was needed in the first place! In addition, he unpacks ventilators, heart monitors, vital signs monitors, etc, from his vehicle. When the going gets really tough, another doctor arrives to help out. Another three doctors treat patients at the outposts. "... His provision will already be in place!!!!..."

Friday night Angus does an altar call and sees literally thousands give their lives to the Lord. Awesome! Out of the corner of my eye I catch one of my medics holding his hand up high. Wow, and I wanted only Christian medics here! The night offers little sleep. Some patients need hospitalization. There are some broken bones from falls on the motorcycles, some medical cases, all stable, none life-threatening. When things do quieten down, I am amazed to see medics sitting in small groups, Bibles in hand. Words are falling on fertile land everywhere. Another piece of the Lord's way falls into place. God has a plan with everything. His way, not ours. Why is this repeated over and over again – and again I am still surprised by it?

Saturday morning breaks cool and clear. Soon the heat takes over but all runs well. The medics are doing their job, the doctor is amazing. The service is electrifying. Men are called to honour God, to put Him first, to honour their family. Angus talks of the war that the devil is waging against all believers. We need

to be fit to fight the war. He does push-ups, runs on the stage, tells us that God loves us and wants a personal relationship with us, and tells us that God talks to us. He tells us to read the Bible, and makes us promise that we will. "Good people don't go to heaven, BELIEVERS go to heaven!"

He tells us how he has had a restless night, with no sleep. He has had a fever, but after his wife prayed for him, the fever has left him. He tells us that he is tired but must fight the war. After two hours he is visibly exhausted, and after praise and worship we make our way back, slowly, between 200,000 men. No sooner do we reach our tent when a marshal rushes over with the news that we are needed urgently at the main stage for a patient who has collapsed. We make our way back through the endless crowds, eventually reaching the stage, only to find one of our ambulances already there.

I find it strange that the patient is under the stage, but push through anyway. Maybe they needed the shade for the patient. Near the entrance I find an elderly gentleman lying on the floor. He is covered in sweat, already has a drip up, and has an oxygen mask on. I kneel down next to him to assess him, and discover it is Angus. Even lying there, he keeps telling us that this is a war; the devil will attack everywhere. He explains that he is exhausted! Whilst still lying on the floor, he makes plans for the night service. He will take it easy tonight – maybe even sit on a chair whilst preaching. We all know that this will be impossible for him. Even so, we remove the drip and help him to his feet. Outside the stage area, men are praying and singing, and shout and clap when Angus appears. He is taken to his house by car, still weak.

Thirty minutes after we arrive back at the tent, another usher appears. We need a stretcher urgently at Angus' house. No other information. Could be someone who has come for prayer, or could be Angus himself... We fly through the crowds. Security men let us through, and we grab the stretcher and jump-bags before rushing into his modest house. The walls are thick, with small windows, and little light. We are spotted and chased out. Once we get out into the light, we are recognized and sent around the house to the front lawn. There we find Angus, on his side, unresponsive – our Zulu Dr and another Dr at his side. The heart monitor is already attached, a new drip running full speed. I ask the doctor for an update. He informs me that Angus collapsed, and glances at the monitor. One look and my worst fears are realized. The rhythm is very abnormal, with an inverted T wave, typically found with a heart attack. I look at the blood pressure monitor. More bad news, it reads 80/40. The oxygen mask is already on, with all holes masked up to try and increase the concentration of oxygen delivered to Angus.

I have seen this many times before. I know what happens next. These are the precious few seconds we are given to prepare for the inevitable. CPR is just seconds away. Angus has already received his Disprin and TNT Spray to dilate blood vessels around the heart and assist with the breaking down of blood clots. He is deeply unconscious. I know the drill, so I pull out my drug bag and break open the resuscitation drugs we will need shortly; adrenaline in one syringe, atropine in another, calcium gluconate in a third. To counteract acidosis that occurs during CPR, I set up the sodium bicarbonate drip,

but don't attach it yet. Angus is still going, barely, which gives me a chance to select the tube that will shortly go down his throat to assist in his breathing. I check the equipment to do this with. He is still going, barely. I pull out the paddles from the heart machine, and place the gel next to it. This will be needed to deliver the shocks to his chest to attempt the restarting of his heart. At this stage Angus' blood pressure remains low, despite the drip running full out. I select another, smaller, drip and add four ampoules of adrenaline to it. Sometimes this helps to increase the blood pressure. It seems to be working. His blood pressure climbs slowly to 100/60, still dangerously low, but better.

Now we need to decide on how to move him to a specialist as quickly as possible. A helicopter has already landed, but a quick inspection shows that we cannot lie Angus down anywhere inside the cramped aircraft, and his condition is too critical to take a chance. A medical helicopter is required, and is summonsed. How lucky that I know the manager personally, and can dispense with all formalities of protocols and guarantees of payments. Is this luck? The helicopter leaves immediately.

In the distance, I hear the call over the massive speakers for the men to get together and pray. Tens of thousands heed the call and move in that direction. Thousands more collect around Angus' house. Loud prayers are heard everywhere. I am acutely aware of the chill in the air, the clouds that are suddenly building up. "THIS IS WAR" keeps going through my mind. If this is a war, I am living in the middle of it. This servant of GOD is being struck down.

Angus slowly regains consciousness. His family

is by his side. There is no panic, no fear. I have never experienced this before. They are just by his side, holding his hand. Such peace. There is no doubt in anybody's mind that Angus is about to meet the Lord. The helicopter lands and another paramedic jumps out. Caleb, one of the best paramedics I know – and trust. After a quick handover, Angus is loaded into the helicopter and takes off. I can still see his face, straining to look out, waving with both hands.

I feel exhausted, and spend a long time picking up the medical waste. With a heavy heart, I go back to the tent. I am dismayed at the number of people packing up their tents and leaving. At the same time, I have no doubt that Angus will not be back soon, if at all. However, I know that I am not here to meet Angus. I am here to meet Jesus. That night, rumours spread that Angus has been discharged. However, I know better. I was there, I had seen the cardiac rhythm, had seen the low blood pressure, and had personally infused the adrenaline. Either way, I attend the night meeting, and find peace and joy in knowing God.

The next morning I am summonsed to set up a station under the stage. Angus will preach! How can that be? Obviously he has forced himself out of hospital, and barely clinging to life, will now attempt a sermon in spite of his condition! How wrong I am. He arrives with his family and friends, is full of life, kneels and prays before going up to the stage to present his sermon. He talks of his day lying helpless on his lawn, and asks if we are ready to meet the Lord? He was close to meeting Him yesterday, but he was healed. The cardiologist ran stress tests; they ran blood tests, and every other conceivable

test. Final diagnosis: NOTHING. NO ABNORMALITIES DETECTED. No abnormal chemical levels, no traces of heart damage, NOTHING. He is discharged three hours after arriving at the hospital. Either I need to go back to study, because after twenty-five years I have no idea what I am doing, or accept that God is capable of great miracles. Personally, I believe the latter.

Angus preaches, and many more give their lives to the Lord. It is a war, and those that left before Sunday, are the casualties of this war. Those that stayed saw the greatness of our God. Those that came to meet Angus were disappointed. Those that came to meet God met Him.

Sunday afternoon comes, and we pack up. We are exhausted, but feel alive. My body tells me it's been through hell. Every joint aches; every muscle complains. It feels like it's been at war. My soul is alive and on fire. God is mighty, He is good. I pay my medics. Total cost? EXACTLY the amount quoted three months before the event!!! Travelling costs, meals and disposables will be recovered from the few ambulance transfers done by the ambulance. "... His provision will ALREADY be in place" just does not want to get out of my mind.

At the debriefing we hear testimonies of men whose businesses back home improved dramatically whilst they were serving at Mighty Men. We hear of SMSes of impending danger that were received before Angus' collapse, people phoning from around the world with prayers and words of encouragement. What an awesome GOD we serve! We are warned of the devil's attack in the week to come, where he will try and destroy all the good that has been done. Already there is talk of Angus having

been flown to hospital with a stroke; that this is done only for money, etc. The devil is at work, and THIS IS WAR. OUR GOD IS GOOD... ALL THE TIME!!!!

In total we treated close to two hundred patients. Dr Ntuli was awesome. The experience was great. It allowed me to serve with the gift that God has given me. It allowed me to grow in my faith. Would I do it again? ANY DAY! Should we do it again? The devil will have won the battle in the end if we don't.

Hans Hartmann

Paramedic

Believer

Just the other day Jill was reading that it's only through fiery trials that the salt of a man comes out. It's only through times of severe testing that our character is, in fact, built up. Some people preach that if there's sickness there must be sin. That's not always the case. Even Jesus spoke about it when He healed the man who was born blind (John 9:1-12). When the disciples asked Him who had sinned, the man or his parents, Jesus said that none of them had sinned. Jesus Himself suffered more physically, as well as mentally and spiritually, than any other person who has ever lived.

Just as happened to Simon Peter, I can honestly say that that weekend, the highlight of my life to date, not only brought me to my knees, but also to maturity. Simon Peter realized that without God he could do nothing. When I lay on the lawn that Saturday afternoon, I knew that I could do nothing. There were two hundred thousand men who had come to hear the Gospel. I was incapacitated. I could do nothing. I came of age. I realized in an instant: God, if You

don't do it, it's not going to happen.

Of course He did it! Not only did He do it, but He completely healed me. They tell me that when some men have a heart attack – and I had possibly two – they are out of action for up to six months. Some never recover. I was back home within three hours, totally restored. I have come of age. My life is only starting to count now.

As I am writing this book, I have taken a couple of weeks' rest. I am sitting down at the beach in a little beach cottage surrounded by natural trees and bush, looking out at the vast ocean. Most days Jill and I have got up and sat on a deck overlooking the sea, drinking our tea as the sun comes up, literally out of the sea, in the east. It is totally different every day. It is beautiful. Some mornings it is blood-red, other mornings it's camouflaged by the clouds, and then it starts showing rays of light that look like a crown. Yet other days, it comes out of the ocean like a ball of fire.

But I have realized, as have my wife and family, that every single day is a gift from God. Every day that sun comes out of the sky – and it's been doing that for me for the past sixty-one years – and I've only now realized what a gift and what a blessing it is. When you come of age, you stop complaining and start thanking God for every thing that He has given you, indeed for every breath that you breathe.

I have realised that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. When I reflect back on that awesome event, the 2009 Mighty Men Conference, there was a depth of brokenness and repentance and a move of the Holy Spirit which one cannot explain. In fact, when speaking by telephone to a number of men throughout the nation, they have said that when other men, who couldn't make it to the conference, have asked them what took place

and how it impacted their lives, they become dumbstruck. They cannot explain what took place.

There are no words to explain what the Holy Spirit did that weekend. All we know is that the fruit that has been borne through that weekend is revival. Newspapers, secular magazines, not to mention Christian magazines, have carried articles where men have said their lives have been transformed. What has touched me, probably more than anything, is that their wives have written in and said that their husbands have come home with a different outlook in life.

Yes, indeed, many have come of age. I'm talking about young teenagers (remember the age restriction to come to the Mighty Men Conference is that if a young man can ride a horse and shoot a rifle he's regarded as a man – the same qualifications as the early settlers and the Voortrekkers); mature men; and older men, who have all come of age through what God did on that memorable weekend of 24–26 April 2009.

I spoke to some of my close confidantes and told them that if I could have preached the four best sermons that I've ever preached in the entire span of my preaching ministry, a period of close on thirty years, I could never have had the impact, or even a part of the impact, that that incident had on our lives that weekend. Everybody has been unanimous about that.

I do not believe that the devil tried to kill me that weekend. I do believe that God allowed that situation to take place so that we could come to a state of brokenness and realization of just how short this life is, and to understand what the brevity of life means.

Peggy O'Neill, that faithful old intercessor of ours who

has been with me since our work began, is a lady who understands what suffering really means. Even as she prays for me now, she prays from a wheelchair because she has had one leg amputated due to diabetes, and the other leg is not strong. She suffers from cancer, from high blood pressure and from many other ailments, and yet she is indeed one of the most beautiful people I have ever known in my life.

She wrote me a lovely card, which I cherish and keep in my Bible, the type of card that older ladies write. It's a card that's got frills all round the side, and lovely sunflowers on the outside, and a little angel with his hands lifted up towards the Lord. In it she says, "Hi, Buchan-Hare." I need to clarify that. We've had a standing joke between the two of us for many, many years relating to the story about the tortoise and the hare. She is a spiritual mother to me and senior in years to me. She has observed my lifestyle and calls me Buchan-Hare because I'm always running flat out all over the place. She's steady and just keeps on faithfully plodding along but she always seems to get there before me.

The card continues: "We serve a faithful God. I understand only too well, Buchan-Hare, when you said you've come of age. The same thing happened to me a short while ago on the trip I had back from the UK. God has given both of us a second chance." Then she said something very interesting. She quoted something that we have said for many, many years at Shalom: "One genuine miracle equals a thousand sermons."

I believe with my whole heart that's exactly what took place on that weekend when we, approximately two hundred thousand men, came of age. The devil also tried to do a very foolish thing. He tried to eliminate me from the Mighty

Men Conference, thinking that it would be destroyed. But through that apparent tragedy, came goodness. It worked in exactly the opposite way, as it always does, because the Bible says that all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). I was taken out of the equation for a few hours and the conference went on from strength to strength. You see, the conference actually had nothing to do with me. It was all about God and He was in full control. He healed me miraculously. And as a result He showed those men – the future leaders of our nation and the world – that He is a miracle-working God.

I read somewhere that the definition of success is failure turned inside-out. God takes a supposed failure and turns it into a success.

The story is told of a man who was sitting at his desk. On the window-sill there was a cocoon. Inside the cocoon was a beautiful butterfly trying to emerge. He looked out and saw the other butterflies flying around in the garden, they were magnificent. The colours in their wings were brilliant, especially when they were caught in the sun. He watched this beautiful insect trying to get out of the cocoon but the opening seemed to be too small. He sat at his desk and watched for hours as this little insect tried to get through the restricted opening.

He thought he would help it a little, so he took a pair of fine scissors and slit the opening, ever so slightly, so that this beautiful butterfly could come out. Within a few minutes, it emerged and started to crawl on the window-sill. It stopped, lay in the sun for a few seconds, then tried to fly but couldn't. Eventually it fell off the window-sill and perished.

The man was quite distraught. He didn't know what had happened until he realized that God has created these insects so that they need to struggle and undergo immense pressure as they go through the opening of the cocoon. The blood is then pressed into the wings through the pressure that the insect experiences while coming out of the cocoon. This is what gives life to those wings, so that it can fly away. This poor man, in his efforts to help the struggling insect, had actually killed it in the process, because the lifeblood couldn't get through to the wings. It couldn't fly and so it died.

Many a time we ask: "Lord, what is going on? Lord, how could You allow this to happen?" That's what they said about Jesus Christ when He died on the Cross. All His followers thought that that was the end of it. But, you see, He had to die for your sin and mine, so that we would have an opportunity to escape the clutches of eternal damnation and hell. That is why Jesus said to His Father: "Father, not My will, but Your will be done." Because He went through with it, that amazing victory took place on Easter morning.

I can honestly say to you that through the trial of coming of age, God has given me new life in my wings. He's given me new insight and I know, trust and believe that He's done that to and for all the men who came to the conference. Many of those men call me *oom* Angus, (Afrikaans for Uncle Angus), a sign of respect. Some of them are even older than I am, and I am deeply honoured by that title. Out of a potential disaster, out of a potential failure of the whole conference, in God's hands, it actually became the tool that changed our hearts, starting with mine, and going up towards every other man and boy who attended that conference, and spreading into their

respective families as they went home.

That's the most beautiful thing about Christianity. I've heard some people call it the upside-down Gospel, because the Lord says that if you want to become great, you must become the least. If you want to be blessed, you must be a blessing to others. If you want to be first, you must be last. I've seen that so many times. So often it's not the man on the platform that's the instrument of God, it's the others who are quietly getting on with the job behind the scenes.

Someone I have always esteemed very highly is a man by the name of Brian Oldrieve, who operates out of Zimbabwe. He's a mature man who has also come of age. I've had the privilege of meeting him on a few occasions. He owned a number of farms when the land takeover by the war veterans took place in Zimbabwe. He also had a Bible College and an agricultural college. He was doing tremendous work with the emerging farmers, teaching them how to plough and how to cultivate their crops.

He was thrown off his farm and threatened with death if he returned. Before he left, though, he taught those very people who had thrown him off his farm how to use his irrigation pumps, how to operate his tractors. He literally blessed his enemies before he left. It sounds absolutely ridiculous, doesn't it, but that's exactly what Jesus expects of you and me. Up to that point those people were totally blinded, but that man has sown good seed and that seed will bear, and is bearing fruit.

You cannot bless somebody and think: They will never appreciate it. I used to think that before I became a believer: It's a waste of time. They don't understand. They don't appreciate it. But that is a lie. These are things that God is revealing to me now. It is an absolute lie! They do

appreciate it. They will appreciate it. They will never forget the thing you did for them. That piece of bread, a cup of cold water in Jesus' name is never forgotten.

I remember that wonderful film *Chariots of Fire*. It's a true story about Eric Liddell, a young man who was running for Jesus. The other man, his main rival, was running for self-gain and also to try to justify his life and his background.

Eric Liddell became a gold medallist at the Olympic Games. He was the man who would not run on a Sunday, because he didn't believe that was the day for sport. He was severely tested on his belief because the Prince of Wales, the future king of England, put amazing pressure on him and told him he would be running for his king and his country. He refused, saying, "No, my King says that I will not run on a Sunday."

Reluctantly, they put him in other races that he hadn't trained for: the two- and four-hundred metres. He ran those during the week, not even having prepared for them, and came home with gold medals.

The part in the movie that really touched my heart and brought me to tears was when he was about to run the final race for the gold medal. He walked up to each one of his competitors from different countries all over the world, and shook hands with each one. He must obviously have said, "May the best man win!" They stood there with their mouths wide open, amazed at what this man was doing.

If you think about sport today, it's all about "win at all costs; psychologically intimidate your opponent". If you look at the All Blacks rugby side when, for example, they're facing the Springboks (and, by the way, I love rugby), and the All Blacks do that *haka*, it's to intimidate the opposition. If you look at boxing, Cassius Clay, also known

as Muhammad Ali, one of the greatest athletes of all time, would continually taunt and speak to his opponent and psychologically wear him down while he was fighting him in the ring. Even if you look at tennis today, you'll see that they are continually psyching themselves up.

Yet here was a man who went up and in all sincerity shook hands with every one of his opponents, and said, "May the best man win!" Before the gun went off, one of the famous American contenders at the one hundred metres, who was obviously not running against Eric Liddell in that race because he had pulled out of the Sunday final, walked up and slipped a little piece of paper into his hand. He opened it up and it was a Scripture (Isaiah 40:31), encouraging him, telling him that God was with him: "Those who wait upon the Lord..." With that, the gun went off. Eric Liddell just ran with that beautiful music playing in the background and, as the saying goes, won the race by a country mile.

So often we don't understand why things happen at the time. But, when we look back in retrospect, we can see God's hand in everything. I know, and will continue to believe this until the day I die, that the Lord Jesus Christ had the perfect plan for the glory of God to come down on that Mighty Men Conference. He showed us just how fragile life is. He showed us just how irrelevant man actually is in His plan of things, although He loves us so dearly that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us on the Cross of Calvary. What an honour, what a privilege it is to be just a very small part of the huge plan which God has for our lives!

It's not for us to ask why. It's not for us to question God. Think of Job when he was angry and confused, fearful and unsure. He started to talk to God and to ask questions. God asks him (Job 38):

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

"...Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?

"...Have you explored the springs of the sea? Or who can pour out the bottles of the heavens?

*"...Have you entered the treasury of snow,
Or have you seen the treasury of hail,*

"Which I have reserved for the time of trouble?

*"By what way is light diffused,
Or the east wind scattered over the earth?*

"Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water,

Or a path for the thunderbolt,

*"To cause it to rain on a land where there is no one,
A wilderness in which there is no man;*

*"To satisfy the desolate waste,
And cause to spring forth the growth of tender grass?*

"...Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades?

"...Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?

"Can you set their dominion over the earth?

"Can you lift up your voice to the clouds that the abundance of water may cover you?

*"Can you send out lightnings, that they may go,
And say to you, 'Here we are'?*

"Who has put wisdom in the mind, or has given understanding to the heart?

"Who can number the clouds by wisdom?

"...Can you hunt the prey for the lion? Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions?"

This is when I realise that in the sight of God we are so small, yet He loves us so much.

Through fiery trials, through the salt coming to the surface, we are able to understand that our future and that of our family, our loved ones and the nation is held in God's hand. When we can understand that, then peace comes upon us. Peace which is indescribable. Peace like a river that just flows over us and gives us that deep joy.

When I lay on that grass, helpless as a babe, there was a peace in my innermost soul, because I was totally out of control. I could see everything, hear everything that was happening round about me, but I could do nothing for myself. Yet I knew that I was in God's hands, because I have come of age!