

HIS PRESENCE – John Diamond Brisbane Australia

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My son lay dying. As I stroked his silky blond hair, I wept in anguish that his time with us had been three short years.

As he slept, I remembered my mother's death when I had been only a couple of years older than Christopher was now. My five-year-old mind was not capable of understanding a great deal, but I knew that mother and I were alone in the house. As I lay in my cot looking through the bars towards her bed, I could hear her gasping for breath. Suddenly a robed figure stood at the foot of her bed.

Although I could not make out his countenance, He said to me, "Don't worry, John. Everything will be all right."

His presence had given me a sense of peace. I have always felt He was there to take my mother home. Since that time, I seemed to know God was with me. While I was growing up, I went to a boarding school where I felt God's presence in the sanctuary. Leaving school, I joined the Royal Air Force and then entered the field of computers. After emigrating to Australia in 1968, I met and married my wife Joy. We settled in Brisbane.

In 1974, I was invited to attend a businessmen's luncheon. I thought it was a good idea because I could meet businessmen who might require computer time. Imagine how I felt when the men hugged each other and clapped their hands! Yet I felt they had something special. I was interested because I had been thinking there had to be more to religion than Sunday morning.

A year later I was invited to a banquet where Demos Shakarian was the guest speaker. At the close, he invited people to come forward for ministry. The first invitation was for salvation. I thought I do not need that. The second was for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. "I don't need that, either," I thought. But then Demos asked businessmen who had problems at work to come forward. I was having difficulties, and the urgency to go forward pressed in on me. My heart felt like it was racing. I pushed my chair back, thinking how stupid I must look as I nearly ran to the front.

My hands went up, and all I could say was, "Please, Jesus, help me. I need you so much." I continued praying, asking for Jesus' help. Someone prayed for me, and I could feel the presence of God touching me. I now knew Him as my personal saviour, but I also knew there was more. My Fellowship friends began praying with me to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Lord was blessing me and making changes in my life and I knew it, but I still wasn't at peace about the fulness of the Spirit. At the first National convention of FGBMFI to be held in Brisbane - May 1976 - I responded to the invitation for prayer. There at the altar, I was slain in the Spirit and the Lord gave me my prayer language. My "Sunday morning Christianity" gave way to a new, power-filled life in Jesus.

Joy frequently questioned me about the luncheons and banquets, but I found it hard really communicate to her that Jesus is alive and that she too, could have a personal relationship with him. Each night I'd put my hand on her head as we went to sleep and silently pray, "Lord, Joy is for You, in Your time."

When we decided to visit my relatives in England, I prayed, Lord, if you want me to witness for You, then I must have my wife know you as her Lord and Saviour." I also had a vision that I would attend a FGBMFI banquet, but when I inquired, I found there was no chapters in London.

A few months later during lunch Joy said to me, "John, there is something I've been wanting to say for a fortnight." I wasn't prepared for her next remark. I thought she'd say something about the house.

"You've changed, John," she said. "God seems so real to you. I want to know Him, too. The next time there is a banquet, I want to go." Joy went with me to our next banquet. I was surprised when the chairman asked me to give my testimony. When our evening speaker gave the altar call, Joy responded and was born again! God had answered my prayer. Joy became a Christian before we went on our

holiday to England. While we were there, I attended a banquet in London to form the first FGBMFI chapter. The men who were organising the chapter mentioned that they had only thought about three months before, but God had shown me 11 months before that I would be there.

Two years later, in March of 1979, our little Christopher was diagnosed as having cancer. We were told there was no worldly hope for a cure. But my parish priest, Full Gospel Fellowship friends, Joy and I had a healing service. We anointed Christopher with oil and laid hands on him. We prayed, believing that our request for his healing had been granted. Another minister shared that I must be willing to give Christopher up to God, for His perfect will to be done.

Monday, May 7, I was at Christopher's bedside asking God what I should do. If only I could experience God's presence and have peace about my son as I had when my mother died. I cried out to God. "Father, wherever You are in that vast space between heaven and earth, please let me know what to do."

God's answer came through the lips of my son, the last words he spoke: "Praise the Lord."

When I began praising Him, I knew the Holy Spirit was with me. I felt the Lord's presence just as I had when I was a child. Only ten minutes after the Lord urged me to praise Him, Christopher went to meet Jesus. He went so quietly it took me a few seconds to realise what had happened. Although I knew the presence of the Lord was with me, it was still not easy to give up my son. Hadn't prayed for a miracle? Hadn't we anointed him with oil and claimed his healing? What was I to think?

These questions have not had quick or easy answers, even though we have known the peace of God throughout the trying times. We did learn that children afflicted with Christopher's kind of cancer generally suffer a great deal. Doctors, we learned after Christopher's death, had been puzzled that his illness had not evidenced the pain they expected. We believe this lack of pain was an answer to prayer.

In September 1979, four months after Christopher's death, God blessed us with a beautiful, healthy daughter to enrich our lives. Last Christmas (1979) I had some photographs made from slides we had taken of Christopher. When I pulled the pictures from the envelope, my eyes filled with tears once again at our loss. Hurrying across the street to a church, I sat in back and gave way to my grief, once again asking the Lord, "Why?" My tears finally subsided, and I returned to work. Before the day was over, an elder in a local church approached me. He said he had been in the audience at a recent prayer breakfast where I had given my testimony. He related that he now felt much more able to minister to bereaved people in his congregation because my sharing had helped him understand how to relate to them.

In God's goodness, He had given me another evidence that blessings could come out of the tragedy of Christopher's death.

God has allowed me to minister on several occasions to those who have lost children as we did. I praise Him that He has shown me that He really will turn our mourning into joy.

God has continued to give comfort, sometimes at totally unexpected moments. At a prayer meeting not long ago, we sang praises and went into a time of personal worship. My thoughts were on the cross of Jesus, but suddenly the cross disappeared, and I was looking at beautiful clouds. As they parted, I saw the right hand of Jesus. Holding His hand was Christopher, dressed in a familiar T-shirt and shorts. I was assured once again that Christopher was with the Lord.

King David experienced the loss of his child as recorded in 2 Samuel 12:23 and said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Those words have become our promise, but we also recognise that God can receive glory now as we await that time. Our prayer is that we will not miss any opportunity to with others the love Jesus has showered upon us. He has truly shown us that Romans 8:28 is for today. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God ..."