



So? Go!

**A SEQUEL TO
WHEN TODAY
BECOMES TOMORROW**

by Mary Jane Ponten

SO? GO!

A sequel to: When Today Becomes Tomorrow

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Serving those affected by disabilities worldwide.

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FORWARD

It's like an explosion. So many things have happened since 2002 when we published *When Today Becomes Tomorrow*. Many people have encouraged me to update how God has been working in my life. This is why "So?, Go!" is presented. I hope you will enjoy it.

Why "So? Go!"

At this writing I am 78 years of age. I still have cerebral palsy along with a few other goodies such as arthritis, osteoporosis, cervical and spinal stenosis, all the pleasures of aging. I live in constant severe pain. Why don't I just sit down and delegate tasks to others?

Every once in a while I have a conversation with God stating that I'm too old, too disabled, etc. His response seems to be pretty clear. Have I called you? So? Go! I'll be with you until it's time to stop.

So I go, and love every minute of it.

Written in hopes of blessing you, the reader.

Love and blessings,

Mary Jane Ponten

Mary Jane Ponten

CHAPTER 1

THE ONLY BIBLE

When Today Becomes Tomorrow seemed a harmless title so the local officials gave us permission to offer it with each wheelchair, cane, or pair of crutches.

We were in China. As the Wheels for the World team set up for the outreach local officials were looking over everything. Even though we had previously been given permission by the national officials to “offer” Bibles and books to the people who received equipment, the local officials determined that they did not want Bibles to be offered. Then they looked at “Joni” and determined since God was mentioned on the cover they would not accept it. “When Today Becomes Tomorrow” looked harmless enough so permission was given to offer that one book to the people.

When I was told of this decision I was very thrilled at first, even flattered. Then I started thinking. If indeed those few stories from my life would perhaps be the only Bible some would ever read, had I said enough? Was the message clear enough? Was Christ held up high enough? These were very sobering thoughts. It indeed gave me a new perspective on the words I put down on paper.

“Your life may be the only Bible some people will ever read.” How often we have heard this said in Christian circles. This remark took on new significance for me that day in the middle of China during the 2007 Wheels For The World outreach. We had wheelchairs, crutches, and walkers lined up ready for the “seating specialists” to give to needy disabled people. In my area of the

room we had Bibles, copies of “Joni” (the autobiography of Joni Eareckson Tada) and “When Today Becomes Tomorrow” (my autobiography) all in the Chinese language.

It took me back to my mid twenties when I had thought of moving to a city where no one knew me, getting a job, and simply keeping quiet about the fact that I was a Christian. My “logic” was that because of the way I looked and talked, due to my cerebral palsy, people might think I was mentally deranged, and therefore all Christians were crazy. I was being very noble and willing to make the “ultimate sacrifice” for the cause of Christ.

What I was really doing was feeling sorry for myself. This was pointed out to me by a young woman doctor who saw right thru my excuses. Perhaps I even wanted to bribe God to heal me so I could “serve Him better.” Whatever my subconscious reasoning, God saw right through it, and as always He had His plan for my life.

His plan was to glorify Himself in and through my disability. Once I was willing to accept God’s plan as, not just okay or better, but His best for my life, He began glorifying Himself through what the world saw as my weakness.

Between my twenties and my seventies it feels like several lifetimes have passed with many ups and downs. However each step, each day, each event has been part of His plan to bring glory to Himself through an unlikely life. I haven’t always fully cooperated, but whatever glory there may be belongs to God alone.

People read my life. I still have cerebral palsy. Along with other things which time, life, and age have added such as arthritis, osteoporosis, cervical and spinal stenosis just to name the major challenges of daily life these days. With the exception of the C P, the onset of each has added new dimensions in pain.

How I chose to deal with the pains is addressed in the chapter

“Oh, My Aching Back.” How I chose to have people interpret my life is a matter between me and God. This is what I want to share in this chapter. I have chosen not to let my face reflect the usual pains of life.

A smile goes a long way. Twisted or straight, a genuine heartfelt smile aimed directly at the face of a person can break down many barriers and pre-conceived notions about people who have disabilities. No it doesn't always have instant results, but a sad or angry face is guaranteed to bring unwanted results. Give it a try.

Walk, or ride tall, head held high! “Wait a minute. Do you know who you're talking to?” Yes, I understand that there may be some physical limitations. Within our own possibilities we need to do our best to look, act, and feel appropriate and socially correct to display our self worth and dignity. We need to allow our body language to display confidence and correctness when we are seen in public, at work, school, church, or wherever. Be proud of who we are in Christ. Be proud of Christ. He made us!

Good eye contact, again as possible, shares who you are. My eyes NEVER work together. Further, I rarely know which one I'm using at any given moment. (Typing that last sentence I noticed at least three changes in the use of my eyes.) I'm suggesting that we need to make an effort to look at the person we are talking with or who is speaking to us. To say the least, this is polite.

Some of my best friends and I laugh about it. They will ask “Which eye are you using right now?” Honestly, I don't know, but one of them is looking at my friend. When you are close friends it's alright to joke WITH each other about something like this. Just be sure you are joking with, not laughing at, someone.

It can be handy, like when I was driving my car. One eye was on the road, the other looking around. Honestly, I had a better grasp of the road and traffic around than the average driver. Turn a lim-

itation around to your advantage.

Joyful conversation, with sincerity will show that we care, really care, about others. If I say, “How are you?” I need to listen to your answer and respond accordingly.

A warm hand shake not only shows recognition but can go a long way toward dispelling the fear that “You might catch what I have.” It also discourages a patronizing pat on the head. You know what I mean! I’m not a little girl, or worse, a cute little puppy dog to be petted. I may be cute – but not that cute. Tee hee.

A helping hand or word of encouragement, particularly when offered to another person who has a disability offers many benefits. It suggests that we have value. It also shows that we understand that others may have needs or just need a word of encouragement.

How do people read our lives? The way we speak, the way we act, the manner in which we respond to others, all are read as our “life Bible.” I am far from a good example, but I’m working on it.



Mary Jane sharing the Bible in China

CHAPTER 2

A PLACE IN THE FAMILY

David was God's choice to become King of Israel. The fighting was over. Joy filled the ancient land. During the following months stability was restored and peace reigned. David once again thought of his dear friend Jonathan, the son of King Saul whom he replaced.

They were indeed best friends. All of us can remember that one person who was or is, and perhaps always will be that in our lives. In my case it was and is Elsie Thyberg Butler. We live four states apart now, see each other occasionally, but there is no doubt about our close friendship.

David and Jonathan came together during a very harsh time in history. Saul had sinned and been rejected by the God of Israel. He did not want to lose his kingdom. But then what king would? He became angry, bitter, and jealous of young David whom God had chosen to succeed him on the throne. Saul went so far as to try over and over to kill David.

During those very dark days the two young men, David and Jonathan, who had been friends for a long time, drew ever closer to one another. They clearly understood that one of them would become the next ruler of Israel and the other would lose his life. They made a solemn pact. The one who lived would care for the family of the other.

We all know the story. Saul and Jonathan were killed on the same

day. The kingdom gradually settled down and David reigned as king. One day, we are told in Second Samuel chapter 9, David remembered his promise to his best friend. He sent men throughout the entire land in search of any relatives of Jonathan who might still be alive. After a long search one son was found.

Now we must remember that in those days there were no “war crimes” trials. Indeed the expectation was that any family survivors would be killed. This son, named Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, was brought before David to do with as he saw fit. Imagine the fear and desperation that must have gone through the young man’s mind as he stood before the king.

Add to the fact that Mephibosheth was related to Saul – the man who had tried over and over to kill David. This young man was also disabled. His nurse had dropped him as they fled the city some years earlier. In Old Testament times people with disabilities were lower on the social scale than the family pet. He had every right to be completely terrified.

David looked at him and saw only the son of his dearest and best friend. He did not see an enemy combatant. He did not see a cripple. He saw the son of the man he loved more than life itself. At that moment he announced that from that time on Mephibosheth would be part of his family – the royal family. He would have all the rights and privileges of a prince in Israel. He would eat at the king’s table. All the property that belonged to Saul and Jonathan would be restored to him. He was grafted, or adopted, into the royal family.

When we first formed our ministry we chose the name Mephibosheth Ministry because of these implications. Our goal was, and still is, to bring people with disabilities into the royal family – to eat at the King’s table - to live with all the rights and privileges of son-ship. Through Faith in Christ we are indeed placed in the family of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ the

Son, the only Son of God.

We are born through faith in Christ into the royal family of God.
We have a place in the family.



My earthly family in 2005
Front seated, Mary Jane Ponten
First row: Alexi Kibbe and Emily Ponten
Second row: Joel Ponten, Daniel Kibbe, and Rachel Shiffer

CHAPTER 3

BECAUSE OF JOYCE

Joyce Bray lived in Amargosa, a small community in the vast Nevada desert. She was born with a severe disability, functioning at quite a low level through adulthood. Her family pushed her in her wheelchair and kept her visible in the community. I tell you this story with the permission of her siblings.

At her birth Mr. and Mrs. Bray were told to put their baby into a state hospital. Her father's response was "The Lord didn't give us this child to institutionalize her. We will take her home and raise her ourselves." True to his word Mr. Bray survived his daughter by only a short time. Mission accomplished!

My daughter, Susan, lived in Beatty – the next town north of Amargosa on highway 95 - where Jeff Taguchi was pastoring Beatty Community Church. Susan had told her pastor about her mom who was in active ministry. The day I was introduced to Jeff his eyes told the whole story. He thought to himself, "What happened! Has this woman had a stroke or something. She is certainly no longer able to do active ministry! Poor soul!"

By the end of that first week he understood how foolish his first impression had been. He and the church invited me to offer my three day disability training seminar there. I did so on my next visit to Beatty. The story I tell you is Jeff's introduction to disability ministry.

Jeff had seen Joyce many times out in the community with her parents. They showed such love and joy in her as part of their

family. God had put it on Jeff's heart to somehow communicate with Joyce. Years later I learned that this was the real reason he wanted the seminar.

During the three days of training I shared many ways to be both appropriate and sensitive when talking to a person who was using a wheelchair. I also addressed the issues of conversing appropriately with an adult who has limited understanding. Jeff took this training and used it every time he saw Joyce and her family out and about for several years. Joyce made no response or sign of acknowledgement. Yet Jeff continued faithfully in his desire to reach her.

One Sunday morning Jeff was filling the pulpit at the Amargosa Christian Fellowship. As usual the Bray family was sitting toward the back. When Jeff got up to speak Joyce began to motion to him. This was the first and only time she showed any recognition. He went back and asked what she wanted.

His tie (which he rarely wears) had turned backwards. Joyce reached out and turned it around. He thanked her and went on to speak. This was a turning point in Jeff's life.

First Joyce got an infection and was called Home, later her father followed her into the presence of God. Finally Joyce's brother who was a pastor stood by his mothers' bedside as she faced the end of her earthly journey. Her request seemed strange.

“I want Jeff Taguchi to do my memorial service.”

When Jeff was contacted by Joyce's brother, he asked, “Why me? You are a minister. There are several other ministers who know her better than I do. Why would she ask for me?” He remembers how puzzling this request was to him.

Pastor Bray responded, “Mother said because you loved Joyce,

you could do no wrong.” This man who wanted so sincerely to reach out to one woman with a disability had a positive effect on an entire family.

Jeff has a completely new focus for part of his ministry. Because of his desire to communicate with a woman who had severe physical and mental disabilities he has brought Mephibosheth Ministry into Nanning, China, Taiwan, and Mongolia. He has also been on several mission trips to Ghana, West Africa ministering to the disability community. He and I have started teaching a seminar called “mobilizing the immobile” at the National Missionary Conference. This workshop addresses the why and how of including people who have disabilities on short term mission trips. That was Jeff’s idea.

In the spring of 2007 Jeff and Heather Taguchi adopted four-month-old Emilia in Taiwan. She was born with Down Syndrome. This family is now part of and actively ministering in and to the disability community – because of Joyce!



Jeff, Heather and Emilia



CHAPTER 4

MOBILIZING THE IMMOBILE

A few years ago Pastor Jeff Taguchi cooked up an idea for a workshop he wanted to offer at missionary conventions around the country, including the National Missionary Convention. He called it “Mobilizing the Immobile.”

He had been on some mission trips with me, and taken other people who had disabilities on mission trips sponsored by Commit Ministries as well as Mephibosheth Ministry. God began to impress on him the value and ability of all team members.

Part of it came about after he attended another workshop where the leader was describing the requirements he felt were necessary for people who applied for both long and short term mission service. The group was told that physical strength, endurance, etc. were absolute requirements. There was no place for a person who was even slightly weak, certainly not having any type of disability on the mission field. Life is too rough for them to handle. He said “You must be perfectly healthy.”

The implication was obvious. However, by that time Jeff had already taken people with disabilities – some even full time missionaries – on more than one mission trip. He felt sorry for the misinformed speaker who basically was unaware of the largest unreached people group in his own country. He didn’t realize that they, the unseen, had the right to serve the Lord they love if indeed they are believers.

Together Jeff and I have developed a one hour seminar which we

have presented at various conferences. It addresses issues such as the value of people who have disabilities in the Body of Christ, the church at large, the local church, and para church organizations – including mission groups.

The New Testament is full of Jesus' interaction with people who had various disabilities. He loved and accepted them as valuable people – which back in those days was really innovative thinking. He reflected God's view of the value of all people. Beginning at this point we go further sharing the concept that all who want to serve should not only be allowed to serve but encouraged to.

Is it ever appropriate to encourage people who have disabilities to go on mission trips if they feel God is calling them to serve?

What gives us the right to even think of asking to be allowed to serve in our own country let alone in other lands? Who can better show leaders in other lands the true value of people in their homeland, city, or village the true value of people like me? Jeff, who is totally able-bodied, or me, with the many visible limitations I have?

If I have come half way around the world, speak intelligently and am articulate, do I not show my value. Then I can transfer the idea of my value to those like me in the country I am visiting. I have become a living illustration of how God sees people around the world who share the perceived "shame" of being disabled. You can tell them – I can SHOW them.

How do we make it possible for some to serve in other lands? I often take a friend to assist me. When I am in other lands I don't take my little red power scooter because of power problems/questions. I take a manual chair which requires a push. Sometimes my assistant is also my translator. They are there to help me off and on. They make it possible for me to serve. Leaders need to offer tasks that are attainable and not belittling.

If I can sing – ask me to sing. I have helped paint a building. I have preached many sermons. I have trained pastors in disability evangelism and follow up. I have encouraged children to work hard on therapy – because I did. Now see what I can do? There are so many ways we can be used.

Whether in our home area or half way around the world – use us. Let us serve side by side with you. We will all be blessed.



Mary Jane shares books she has designed with national leaders.

CHAPTER 5

SCHOOLS, SCHOOLS, & MORE SCHOLLS

I met Andrea Linder on the first Wheels For The World (an outreach of Joni and Friends Ministries) outreach to Poland in 1995. For the next three years our friendship grew as we roomed together each year during the Poland outreaches. In 1999 we had each made the decision not to return to Poland. The reasons are not important here. When Andrea and I shared our decision I told her that I was planning a teaching only trip to Ghana and invited her to join me.

We went, just the two of us – with the blessings of Joni and Friends, in the fall of 1999 to Ghana, West Africa. She taught on health and therapy issues. I taught on Biblical issues as well as disability evangelism and follow up. We spent three days in each of four cities. It was an absolutely great experience for both of us.

Subsequently Andrea went on two or three WFTW outreaches to Ghana. By then she had decided to give God one year of her life to see what He wanted her to do. She came to Colorado and attended a Missionary Intern program.

In the summer of 2001 we joined the Wheels team going back to Ghana. However it was understood by the leadership that I would be leaving Andrea in Cape Coast for one year to establish disability ministry under the sponsorship of Mephibosheth Ministry. We had previously established a relationship with Victory Bible Church in Cape Coast. The church offered office space. We found a cute little apartment for her. On September 11th the team was scheduled to return to the

States. Andrea and I met the rest of the team at the hotel in Accra. “Have you heard the news?” By the look on everyone’s faces we knew something really horrendous had happened. The 9/11 attack was on every TV channel and in everyone’s conversation.

We went to the U S embassy that afternoon to register for Andrea’s year long stay. Before we completed the process we were told, “This office is closing. Everyone needs to leave now. We don’t know when we will reopen.” We went back to the hotel and learned what, by then, the whole world knew. No flights were going into the U S A. We were stranded for – no one knew at that point – how long.

During the next five days while we waited for permission to return there were a number of phone calls to New Jersey where Andrea’s family lives regarding whether she should return with us or remain in Ghana as planned.

With the blessing of her parents, it was decided that Andrea would proceed as planned. We left her in Ghana in September of 2001 to see how God would lead. I returned in the spring. Her work was thriving and Pastor Joe, an associate pastor at Victory Bible Church, was giving some assistance, though he was not interested in joining our work. Then I returned again in the fall of 2002.

Andrea met us at the airport – I went a few days early to be with her and then join the Wheels team. During our first five minutes on Ghanaian soil she announced that there were three things she wanted to tell me right now.

Number one: “The papers have been signed and Mephibosheth Ministry is now an NGO in Ghana.” That’s the same as a 501–C(3) here in the U S.

My response was an eye brow raised “OK?”

Secondly: “We’re building a school for disabled here. The land has already been purchased by a friend.”

My response: “We’re what!”

“Lastly, I’m getting married to Pastor Joe!”

As I recall my response was a hug with a “You’re what?”

That was what God wanted for Andrea’s life, not a year, but a lifetime. This started all of us on an incredible journey which is continuing and will for a long time to come. There are now three buildings occupied and a fourth begun. There are 30 children learning and growing. In the fall of 2008 the third building (a second dormitory) will be able to house nearly 20 more students. All this is completely paid for.

Andrea and Joe got married on my birthday in 2003. In May of 2005 God blessed them with a baby, Joshua. He’s a real live-wire, and I have yet another adopted grandchild.

Pastor Jeff Taguchi had come to Ghana with the first construction team. Subsequently he returned several times to help and minister to people in Ghana. He fell in love with Ghana and the work we have there.

Because of Mephibosheth Training Centre Jeff told people at Angel House, a school for children who have cerebral palsy in Nanning, China, about me. So in May 2005 I visited that school, returning in 2006 and 2007 encouraging staff, parents, and students. In ’06 I was privileged to help form a parent support group (unheard of in the oriental culture) at that school. I’m happy to say that this group is thriving.

One glorious story from Angel House started when I asked a group of parents to share their goals for their children. In the

oriental culture one does not share feeling of shame. But without exception the response was that they wanted their children to be able to feed, dress, and toilet themselves.

During the next three days Ayla, my friend and translator in China, and I had numerous conversations with various parents. We encouraged them to think of what I had done and what their children could do if not limited by discouragement, over-protection, and/or lack of goal setting.

We gave copies of ***When Today Becomes Tomorrow*** – in Chinese of course - to most of the parents.

Toward the end of that week the father who had taken on the responsibility of leading the parent support group arrived in his car at our hotel to take us to the airport. On the road he told me



*The children of Mephibosheth Training Centre October 2008,
Joshua is the boy at my feet. Ghana, West Africa*

thru Ayla that his goals for his son – his only child – who has cerebral palsy – had changed. “I now want him to become an independent, respected, successful businessman.” My eyes filled with tears of joy. Mission accomplished – at least for one child in one family in one city of China.

In the spring of 2009, I am looking forward to visiting a similar school in Outer Mongolia. What the Lord has for me there is in His hands. All I can do is share what God has done for a little girl with cerebral palsy who grew up on the south side of Chicago “way back when.”



CHAPTER 6

OH, MY ACHING BACK!

I know this may sound too simple, but that's the way my mind works. Simple and to the point. Someone remarked that I seem to go on the theory of "Trust and Obey." Perhaps that's the way my mind works. But look at the rest of that chorus.

Trust and obey
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.

My body has been bombarded with several pain stimulating situations. Most are the result of aging and a body that doesn't want to cooperate. I can sit down in my overstuffed chair, take pain killers, and feel sorry for myself. That would be a matter of choice. Or I can go to Africa, China, Taiwan, South America, and several states and carry pain killers with me. I'm going to hurt no matter what I choose to do. Wouldn't it be more fun to be active and productive?

It's a matter of personal choice. As long as I'm not doing damage to my health, putting my life in danger, or risking the safety of others, I have the privilege of making these choices before God. I'll know when it's time to slow down or stop altogether. God will show me. It's not just a matter of doing something, nor just trusting, but for me it's a matter of obedience.

God's mandate to me seems to be "So, go!" This may not be His command to you. It becomes a matter of personal choice. If your

doctor tells you that doing this or going there would be harmful, listen to him/her. But then take it to God.

Pain is a natural part of life. Some folks have very little pain, others endure a great deal. We don't have to let our faces show the world that we are in pain.

I have talked this over with my children many times. Tom and Susan know my heart. It would be my greatest joy to be called Home to heaven somewhere in service for my Savior. The kids say that they totally expect someday to get a call from some far away place informing them that I had died and my body will be shipped home. What a joyful day that will be.

Further, I have left very specific instructions with a few well-chosen special friends. If I die in service they are to throw a big party and celebrate. On the other hand if I'm in a nursing home, slowly passing time, well love me. Simply, this is not my FIRST choice for the last years of my life.

Again this is a personal decision. I'm in no way suggesting that everyone should feel this way. Nursing homes serve a very meaningful place in our society, providing gentle, loving care for people who can no longer care for themselves and need special care and help. I just hope I will not have to use their services. My mother was cared for in such a facility for a number of years before her death. They were kind and took very good care of her.



Mary Jane tired, hurting, but very happy.

CHAPTER 7

ALGEBRA: $3 + 3 = C$

Most of us have had at least an exposure to Algebra in junior or senior high school. So I ask the question, when does three plus three equal C, and C does not equal six? A three minute speech delivered at two services challenged a church body. The answer is when C does not equal six, it equals change. One church body was changed.

I was allowed only three minutes in the morning services to share my ministry. What could I possibly share in such a short time that would make any kind of impression? I asked the Lord to open my mouth.

My identity crises first, then the spiritual rights of people with disabilities, were what God seemed to place on my heart. (Make 'em laugh first and they just might listen,)

That Sunday morning in Alaska I began: "I was born with cerebral palsy. No big deal. As far as I knew I was just one of the kids. In fourth grade I was kicked out of my neighborhood school and sent to a school for crippled children. First crisis – over night I learned that I was crippled. In high school I learned that I was no longer crippled, only handicapped. As I got into adult life the third crisis took me from handicapped to disabled." By this time the congregation was in stitches and hanging onto my every word.

Keeping myself from laughing with them was not easy. I needed to communicate everything that I could in the time allotted. I

continued, “By the time our children were teens I learned that I was no longer disabled, only challenged. As a grandmother I was not challenged, only impaired.”

By now I was using body language and gestures to tell the story. I continued; “I was talking with four therapists some time later. I said something about my C P. They looked puzzled. ‘You don’t have C P’

“I don’t? (eyebrows raised) Well what have I got?” a puzzled look across my face, shrugged shoulders, and outstretched hand completed my body language.

”They said ‘we just thought you were getting old.’ I’ve gone from baby to old lady with everything in-between because I have C P.” Proper body language had them really laughing.

“No matter what I am, I am a person who has certain spiritual rights. First, every person who has challenges has the right to hear the gospel – understandably presented. Correct? Next, each one has the right to receive Christ as his/her personal Savior. Obvious! Right number three, the right to grow in Christ. We all need help at this point. Some need more than others. So, give it.

“The final right is the tough one for most people to allow us to take hold of. If I am growing in Christ it’s natural for me to desire to serve Him. Oh, no, no, you say! We’ll serve you. What can you offer us? I challenge you, if you serve, why shouldn’t I? However, you must make opportunity for this to happen.”

By then there was a very loud silence as I struggled down the steps to my seat. I learned later that those three minutes in two services have challenged that church to open hands to assist, eyes to look for opportunities for others like me to serve, and hearts to offer true love and acceptance. Three plus three can indeed equal Change. $3 + 3 = C$

Thank you Father for allowing me to know that you were really using me that morning. So often I wonder, never knowing if my words have made a difference.

3 + 3 = C (Change)



Tait Berge receiving his certificate after two years of study in disability ministry with Mary Jane

CHAPTER 8

THEY KNEW THEY WOULD BE ACCEPTED

Several years ago we were searching for a senior pastor. After the usual correspondence a pastor and his lovely wife from Wisconsin were invited to candidate for this position. They had been serving a rural Evangelical Free Church.

As Don and Judy Leigh went around the church meeting various members of the congregation they met my husband and me. It was very obvious that we both had cerebral palsy. Equally obvious was the fact that we were not only accepted by the church but we were active in the leadership of our fellowship.

The fact that we were serving on headquarters staff of International Students Incorporated did not go unnoticed either. I.S.I. is a nationwide Christian ministry to college students from countries around the world. We were accepted in our church and in a mission organization as valuable to the Body of Christ at large.

They accepted the call to become our pastor and family.

Later they shared with us that because of the way we were accepted and allowed to serve, they knew that as the multiple sclerosis progressed Judy would be equally accepted, allowed to serve, and be part of the Body of Christ known as First Evangelical Free Church of Colorado Springs.

Pastor Don and Judy shared only with the Elders and search

committee that Judy had been diagnosed with M. S. prior to accepting the call to our church. As her M. S. progressed indeed it was no big deal for the congregation to not only accept this, but then step in to help when needed. It's just part of what we do here.

After several years pastoring our church they moved again to Wisconsin as pastor and family. By then Judy was using a power chair and needing increased care. After serving several years Pastor Don retired. Soon they felt the westward call and moved back to Colorado, then to Colorado Springs. Now they were grandparents several times over.

They found their hearts once again pulled to First Free. They are now back with us. Pastor Don is our pastor to seniors. Judy needs a bit more assistance. But they are still accepted and loved as an ordinary part of the Body of Christ.



Pastor Don and wife Judy Leigh

CHAPTER 9

DISABILITY MINISTRY IN ACTION

A TRIBUTE TO FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH COLORADO SPRINGS

It was communion Sunday at my home church. Since I work in the Sunday school office when I am in town, I hopped on my little red power scooter and rolled up to the sanctuary door during the choir anthem in order to be served communion. There were no ushers out right then so I asked a friend to assist me.

My hands no longer work as well as they once did. Taking the “elements” off the tray is awkward and grasping the tiny cup nearly impossible. So I ask for a helping hand. The elders always come out to serve those of us who are outside. My friend Shari walked over to the door with me. Her husband followed shortly. She told him what she was doing. Just then Dave noticed a former pastor’s wife, now needing assistance due to advanced multiple sclerosis, sitting in her wheelchair just ahead of us.

Pastor Don was teaching a Sunday school class during second service that day. Dave very quietly moved from behind me to Judy’s side. A word. A nod. Judy and Mary Jane were both given the assistance they needed.

We don’t have a “Disability Ministry Program,” we just offer ministry out of love when and where it is needed. Perhaps it’s pride on my part, but if we had a sign up sheet to be sure that I had the help I needed during the serving of communion, I doubt that I would be comfortable accepting it. The fact that it is done as a

natural part of the Body of Christ in action makes it a gift of love and genuine acceptance.

This, my friends, is disability ministry in action.



Evangelical Free Church in Colorado Springs, CO

CHAPTER 10

THE SOUTH AMERICAN CONNECTION

It was the year 2000. That year I served on the five major continents, Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America. I have not yet served nor made plans to serve in Australia or the South Pole.

I met Judy Swisher during the “Amsterdam 2000” Billy Graham conference for working evangelists. We were both planning to participate in the Wheels for the World outreach in Peru that fall. She invited me to go early and work with her for a week. Judy is the head of Friends of the Disabled Latin America – now based in Rock Hill, South Carolina - working in several Latin American countries. We had a great time serving together prior to the Wheels team arriving.

During the next few years, after Judy became Mrs. Alberto Nunez, she and Alberto invited me to join them in Bolivia to teach. I have done so several times. While working there in 2007 we were invited to address a conference of pastors working in southern South America. I shared my testimony while she translated for me. After the meeting and many hugs, one pastor from Uruguay seemed especially touched. He hugged me and hung onto me. Through tears he begged me to come to his country and share. We hope to do exactly that in a year or two.

Judy and Alberto have visited in my home and I have been invited to be a speaker at the missions’ conference in their church in the spring of 2009. They have also made it possible for When Tomorrow Becomes Tomorrow to be translated into and printed

in Spanish.

Other connections were made in Peru. Jay and Kim Williams who joined the WFTW team that year came from Alaska, bringing the wheelchair their second daughter had used. Lindy had cerebral palsy and her life had been cut short. They wanted to follow her chair through and tell the child who received it about her.

Jay and Kim's hotel room was right around the corner from mine. For some "unexplainable" reason we bonded. Our friendship has grown. In the summer of 2005 I went to Fairbanks for a ten day visit. We had a great time and did get some ministry accomplished. I got to know their children – Erin and Nick. Now I'm mom and grandma to the Williams' family. What a delightful family they are.

Then in the summer of 2007 the Williams family celebrated a family reunion in Colorado. After the reunion mother and son came to spend a week with me in Colorado Springs while father and daughter had to get back to earning a living. Erin was entering her first year of college that fall. We had a great week. The family was planning to spend Christmas in New Mexico then visit Jay's parents in South Dakota.

Jay and Erin had felt left out during our summer visit and Jay had given instruction to plan several projects they could help with on their way to his parents. So plans were made for the first week in January 2008. The whole family came and worked their little tails off for nearly two weeks in Colorado Springs.

Erin had to return to college, but the rest of the gang stayed, paint brushes covering the walls, brooms and mops cleaning the floors, three truck loads of usables taken to the Salvation Army, and bags and bags of unusables carried to the trash. What a delightful family! I'm sure this will not be the last time we see each other. Lives are touched and connections made wherever one goes.

Watch and see how God chooses to connect your life to others. It may delight you, and certainly will bless you – and others.



Kim and Jay making over my kitchen

CHAPTER 11

NEW LIFE AND BEYOND

It was 1999 and we were in Ghana. A pastor came to me in tears after the session I had taught on “Taboo and Disability.” He laid his head on my shoulder and wept. As he regained his composure he told me that he had a younger sister who was born with a disability. The witch doctor told his parents that they had to take the baby out to the jungle and leave her there. Obediently they did so.

His question was two fold. First, “How can I forgive my parents, the leaders, and the culture I am a part of?” Next, “How can I forgive myself?”

My answer seemed too simple. “Have you asked God to forgive you? If not, let’s do that right now.” Then, “If God has forgiven you, you must find a way to forgive yourself.” He was able to do this. This pastor has become a strong advocate for those in his culture who are disabled.

Until that moment I was not sure that I had my facts straight. I thought someone had taken a long ago tradition and told it as fact. It really was still happening in the villages. This is when I knew I HAD TO make God’s view of people with disabilities a major priority in my teaching.

Many thousands of people have heard the good news of salvation in Christ as we have traveled around the world with disability ministry groups. I’m not using a calculator but thousands of new believers are living on the five major continents because God has chosen to use an unlikely life to carry this message. A great ma-

jority of them have disabilities of one type or another. Many of them had no idea that God had any feelings for them.

Two men in a very small village in Ghana came to get a wheelchair during our Wheels for the World outreach in 2007. As they came to the evangelism area we greeted them. It didn't take long to learn that they had never heard the name of Jesus, let alone who He was or what He did for them.

They were wide eyed and hung on every word. For the first time in their lives they saw hope. They left as new creations in Christ.

Much of what I do is evangelism, the process of presenting the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. In order to be more effective in this task I teach and encourage pastors and church leaders here and in other countries how to reach into the disability community, how to appropriately present Christ, and how to bring new believers from this community into the local church. Finally I share ideas on helping new believers grow in Christ.

Here is the basic outline for “follow up” of a new believer. The ideas I share are designed for new believers who have physical or mental disabilities. Any reader who desires more may write and we'll make sure it is sent.

The Biblical mandate for follow up of new believers

Colossians 1:28 - to present every person perfect (complete/mature)

Colossians 2:2 - 3 - purpose

Rationale – why is this important.

Colossians 2:6 – the same way – by faith

Process and principles

Understand it takes time, energy, and commitment

Principle 1: Sharing what has happened in the “new life in Christ” should be a natural result of the excitement of what has taken place. It

needs to start as early as possible.

Principle 2: It is important to get the new believer into a good church or Bible study group as soon as possible. It would be helpful if each new believer was paired up with a mature believer, of the same sex, and same approximate age.

Principle 3: The new believer needs to begin reading and understanding the Word of God.

Principle 4: It is extremely important that communication lines be open in the spiritual arena. This means both listening and speaking to God. It is called prayer.

We have developed several small books that help in this process. They are:

In His Image

Hand in Hand

Body Language

Taboo and Disability

Beginning Conversations with God.

We also have that three day workshop I spoke about in the chapter “Because of Joyce.” It’s called “Exploring the Needs and Opportunities That Exist Between the Christian and People Who Have Challenges.”

These materials have been developed because most Christian leaders need to have a better grasp on these topics. It has been a great joy and privilege to be used of God in this task. I love seeing minds and hearts open up.



CHAPTER 12

LOOKING AHEAD

Mephibosheth Ministry cannot die with me. It has become a world ministry. It will undoubtedly not look the same, but I need to lay plans for the future of this work of faith.

One such decision concerns a newly formed 501C3 organization named Mephibosheth in Ghana. I have grown to trust Andrea and Joe Jehu-Appiah completely. Along with Andrea's parents, Karl and Gerlinde Linder, this organization has agreed to take full responsibility for receipting and overseeing the finances of the work which is thriving in Ghana. This work includes Mephibosheth Training Centre and a baby church.

I will continue to visit, encourage, love, and pray for them. Soon I will no longer have the day to day responsibilities connected with the Ghana work.

Another decision relates to the materials I have written. The Bible studies and the leadership training materials have been "willed" to Joni and Friends International Disability Center, the disability ministry of Joni Eareckson Tada. Upon my death this organization has agreed to not only accept it, but to keep the integrity of the material. It is to be used for age/ability appropriate people who face challenges. The copyrights for these will belong to them.

When Today Becomes Tomorrow, So, Go! and any other books about my life will be the sole property of my children, Tom Ponten and Susan Kibbe to do with as they wish.

Jeff Taguchi will in all probability continue to represent and work with Mephibosheth Ministry in the Far East, serving Taiwan, China, and Outer Mongolia. Only the Lord knows how far this ministry may spread as we encourage others to minister to people who have disabilities in that part of the world.

A long time younger friend, Tait Berge, is working on his degree in leadership and ethics. Upon graduation he will begin his role as director of church relations.

I have a sneaking suspicion who will step in as director – but can't put it in writing yet. However I have been assured that this unique ministry will not die when I enter the presence of Jesus Christ.

As the Lord blesses me and allows me to retain reasonably good health I plan to continue in my role as Executive Director of Mephibosheth Ministry and truly enjoy every moment in this time of my life. God has His plans for us and of course I bow to His will in everything. His plans will be far better than mine. May His will be done in the future of Mephibosheth Ministry, and may many around the world be blessed through it.



CHAPTER 13

SATISFIED?

The other night as I lay in bed before falling asleep, I was thinking about this book. The chorus of a song came to me. “A perfect closing to this book,” I thought. I’m sure the Holy Spirit placed the thought there.

“I am satisfied
O so satisfied
I am satisfied with Jesus
But the question comes to me
As I think of Calvary
Is my Master satisfied
With me?”

In the light of these sobering thoughts I think we would all agree that this is the question each of us needs to ask ourselves regularly regarding our daily lives. I don’t want to wait until the end of my life to look back and ponder whether my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ could be anywhere close to satisfied with the years I have spent on this planet called Earth and how I did or did not follow Him.

Daily we need to commit ourselves to,

“Follow, I will follow thee my Lord
Follow every passing day
My tomorrows are all known to thee
Thou will lead me all the way.”

*Thank you for your love for
God, Jesus The Holy Spirit
the people we serve, and me.*

