

Chapter 2

GOD PREPARES US

I must have been about 12 years old - just after the Second World War - when for the first time in my life I saw an African. It was a lady, and she told her lifestory in a church in Zurich. I do not remember which country she came from nor what she said, but I remember coming home to tell my mother:

"One day I will go to Africa as a missionary!" My mother just smiled, and so I forgot about it for a long time.

Our home was a happy one and I received from my parents and my sister and brother all the love I needed. Even as a child I had asked the Lord Jesus to live in my heart and had attended several youth camps. But only when I was 19 years old - in my second to last year in a commercial college - that I began to realize that God wanted to have a more intimate relationship with His children.

It was in those years that the Swiss Inter-Varsity Fellowship came into being. The Lord had commissioned a young teacher, Dr. Hans Bürki, to visit universities, teacher training schools and high schools all over the country, to encourage young Christians there to meet for Bible study in their schools, to hold evangelistic meetings and to lead camps. In our school, too, a Bible study group was formed.

In one particular camp session, Hans painted us three portraits of Old Testament characters and pointed out their special, intimate relationship with the living God: Abraham, the friend of God; Moses with whom the Lord spoke "as a man speaks to his friend"; and David, "a man after the Lord's own heart". How I longed to have such a personal relationship with Him too!

That night became a turning point in my life. The Bible became a new book to me. Passages I had known well before, were now relevant to my life. Prayer, alone or with others, was no longer a duty. I started to read all the biographies of missionaries I could get hold of; e.g., Hudson Taylor, C.T. Studd, Norman Grubb and others. Should I attend a Bible School? But I was shy and terrified of speaking in public. Could I ever be a missionary, going out to evangelize? Probably not. Maybe with a husband at my side?

Dating had never been acceptable to my parents, but from that night, my own values had changed too.

"Lord Jesus," I prayed, "you know that I want to serve you with my whole life, not just in my spare time. It would have to be the same for my husband. Therefore I'm asking you to let me fall in love with a pastor or a missionary, otherwise I'd rather stay single..."

The Lord must have taken me at my word, for in my mid-twenties I was still single. But I was far from unhappy - life held so many surprises and adventures. My two best friends and I were leading a weekly Bible study group for secretaries, and lasting friendships were formed. I had also spent a year in England - working in a Christian doctor's family, where I had met a number of missionaries and other interesting people! Also the vast world of Christian literature in English was opened up to me and I made good use of it.

One day the Swiss IVF Schools' travelling secretary, Sam Jenny, sought me out after a meeting in Zurich. He needed a secretary. Would I be willing to consider working with him?

I accepted and never regretted it. That job seemed to be made just for me. One year later, another of my dreams materialized: I was allowed a time of French studies.

Paris - for a whole year! Language school in the morning, office work in the afternoon at the GBU (IVF) travelling secretary's house.

From one of the students there I heard for the first time the name of "Wycliffe Bible Translators" and "Institute of Linguistics". He himself had attended one of their summer courses. Not long afterwards I started getting news letter about this work, sent out by a certain Paul Meier. I knew this name quite well. As one of the leaders of the Basel Christian student group, he had had constant dealings with our Zurich office and I even knew his address by heart! If he was sending out these Wycliffe letters, surely that work must be commendable. I began to get interested. Maybe the Lord would lead me one day to a foreign country with them? They seemed to need plenty of secretaries!

Yet when I actually got a personal letter from Paul Meier, asking me to help at home in this work, it seemed to come out of the blue. Somebody had mentioned my name to him as he was desperately looking for someone to take over the accounts and the sending out of newsletters in Switzerland while he was going to Bible School in Scotland.

That was going too quickly for me! I was interested, yes. But getting more involved? Maybe later, in another country, full time. But not now, as a spare time job.

Yet I couldn't resist the Lord's prompting for long and agreed in the end. Paul therefore planned to travel via Paris, so he could hand over the documents to me personally.

We met on my last day in Paris. It was early summer. Two things of his visit stand out in my memory above all other details. At one point on our conversation he emptied all his pockets and put many coins on the table.

"There, Inge," he said, as he shoved them over to my side of the table, "you take these, I don't need Swiss money any more."

Whatever his other qualities are, I said to myself, one thing is sure, he is generous and not stingy. I found out later that I was not mistaken...

The second thing I remember well is that it was he who did all the talking. No questions about who I was, what my plans were. He talked on as if he knew me already and had complete confidence in me.

Many months later I asked him: "How was it that you were talking so much that day in Paris? I couldn't even get a word in!"

"I know," he smiled, "I was just terribly embarrassed. I was afraid that if I stopped talking, my embarrassment would show. Somehow I had always expected to meet a middle-aged lady as this secretary and was completely surprised to find that you were a young girl! It confused me!"

Our ways parted in opposite directions: Paul to London to take part in the linguistics course - 11 weeks later he was accepted as an approved candidate with Wycliffe Bible Translators - and I back to Zurich to my former work.

My interest in Bible Translation work did indeed grow. Paul kept me well informed. He did not conceal his hope that one day I might also take the linguistics course and perhaps even join the work full time. I made it quite clear, however, that after having been granted a year's absence to learn French I was expected to stay on in my job for several years...

We met again at the end of the year, in the Swiss mountains. One of Paul's friends had offered his bachelor's home for a small workshop - just a few friends, translating material from English into German. Paul invited me insistently to join them for two weekends...

I was completely oblivious of Paul's feelings toward me. He would have shown his attraction to me, had he not read that morning the scheduled passage: "I charge you... do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires..." (S.o.S. 2:7). What a correction from the Lord for his thinking. But he obeyed; I never got the slightest hint that I mattered to him more than the others.

Between those two weekends back home, a conversation upset my whole thought pattern. Sam Jenny, my boss, revealed to me his desire to take up further theological studies abroad. Did this imply that I was no longer under obligation either and free to take the linguistics course that summer?

I knew Paul would be pleased to hear this. He was indeed, yet he wasn't allowed to show it too much!

Again we parted, again the letters flew back and forth. I noticed, however, that his letters came more frequently, were less business-like. The passages with personal remarks grew a bit longer each time...

He was, above all, concerned about what I would do after the linguistics course. Bible College, of course, was his proposal. No, I did not see this. I hated the thought of it. I was afraid of public speaking, having to give devotions, speak at open air meetings. Besides, I just wanted to serve as a secretary and these did not need formal Bible training. And I never dreamt of becoming a translator - I just wanted to work in an office. I gave him a hard time. I was stubborn. I had no idea about his own motives.

Mid-April. Enclosed in one of his letters came a piece of a seaweed - one of those green, transparent wonders of the ocean. It was heart-shaped, with a hole in its center. His comment beside the neatly pressed leaf: "Small, weak, but tough..."

I stared at the green heart. Suddenly I understood its message, the message of all his letters. How could I have been so blind? That was why he wanted me at Bible School! What an impossible situation! How could I get across to him that I did not care for him? More than ever I was determined not to go to Bible College.

"Small, weak, but tough: yes, those are the characteristics I'd like to have...", I promptly wrote back to him. Maybe he would get the point and leave me alone...

But it was as if the string of an instrument had been plucked. Its vibrations wouldn't stop. Did I really not care for him? Did I not look forward to his letters, deeply personal and yet so humorous? Was his strong faith not an encouragement to me? Was I not always disappointed when his letter did not arrive on the usual day? I hardly dared admit it, but the toughness very slowly started to melt away.

Soon another remark stung me. He was absolutely convinced that I would apply for Wycliffe membership that summer. Could he please explain why he knew more about my way ahead than I did myself?

If I had known what my question would open up, maybe I would not have asked.

"Finally," he ended his next letter, "I want to apologize for that silly sentence I wrote. Believe me, I could give reasons for that sentence, but I think that you could not bear to hear them now... Just now my friend burst into my room: 'Come with us on a moonlight hike climbing Ben Lomond!' That will not do me good. I cannot bear the moonlight as it excites my imagination too much. I must be patient..."

I could not sleep that night. I knew only too well what he was only hinting at. What should my answer be? How could I answer a man when I didn't even remember what he looked like? Yes, but hadn't I come to know him from the inside? His struggles, fears, prayers, joys and hopes? There was only one thing that I needed to be sure about: was it the Lord who was behind this?

I lay awake, praying, reading passages of Scripture, thinking, reading again. Finally, I found peace in the two passages about the open door (Is 22:22 and Rev. 3:7). I could believe it was the Lord who had opened that way. Trusting Him, I would go through it.

I was ready for his next letter.

It came the following day. I had not expected it so soon. Although I was prepared for what it contained, I was trembling all over.

"The moon did not shine, but it was beautiful all the same. I wish you had been there too..."

I was still trembling when I went back to the typewriter to work. No wonder I used up so much correction fluid for the stencil I typed - the whole page was red! But it was a trembling with joy, utter delight over the gift of love I was receiving. How could somebody love me so much? How could I ever return it? "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand ... the way of a man with a maiden " (Prov. 30:18).

Does not the love of a woman come as an answer, an Echo, to the love of a man? Is not this the secret of marriage , that the man is to love his wife first, and then the wife will submit to his love? (or: surrender, yield)

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It was now the beginning of May. Two months yet until we could see each other again. Whereas earlier I had received a letter once or twice a week, I was now getting one every day... We had so much to plan. So many impossibilities had to be solved: a successor for my office, acceptance at the linguistics course, and more impossible at such short notice: acceptance at the Bible College where the enrolment date had long since passed.

The Bible College wanted us to come as an engaged couple. But timewise there would be only one day possible for an engagement ceremony: the day of Paul's arrival from Scotland to Switzerland!

Another test for me! Was I really sure that Paul was the Lord's choice for me? Sure enough to get engaged straightaway without meeting him again beforehand? Yes, I was ready even for that. Amidst doubts and waverings my assurance had grown. Paul, of course, was overjoyed with this new plan. He did not need any more testing time!

Reactions among my friends differed greatly. "Don't you think you should wait until you know this guy a bit better?" said the cautious ones. "You are taking a great

risk," warned others. Some just listened and smiled knowingly, maybe thinking, "she will find out by herself soon enough". But some who knew us both encouraged us.

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The 30th of June, our engagement day, dawned a beautiful, sunny summer day. At eleven, Paul's airplane would arrive at the Zurich airport and at noon the guests expected us for the celebration at the hotel. Just one hour we would have to ourselves! A friend of my father had lent me his car. I felt extremely happy, and yet my stomach was in a knot, as I stood on the visitor's balcony and watched the plane land. There! The passengers disembarked and I recognized Paul walking briskly towards the building with his long strides.

The passengers' arrival hall was no place for romantic greetings. We just shook hands and hardly talked as we walked to the parking lot. But when all the bags were tucked into the boot (trunk) of the car and Paul had his hands free - at last... And I? As I threw my arms around his neck - like an echo - I knew. I was at rest. No more questions, no more doubts.

In the cool, quiet forest behind the hotel we spent an hour alone, and then emerged in time to greet the guests.

In the following months we both recognized that God had prepared each one for the other, over the years. There was not a shadow of doubt, just security in knowing that from now on the Lord would lead us one and the same way. But marriage would not be for another year and we had yet to learn the lessons of waiting and self-discipline, and of taking the hurdles by faith.

The first hurdle was the linguistics course in Chigwell, near London. I was a student; Paul was among the teaching staff. I was applying for membership with Wycliffe; Paul had already been accepted the year before. My joy was a little dimmed when I was told soon after we arrived:

"You have to understand that we cannot accept you just because you are engaged to Paul. If your grades turn out to be less than adequate and you were not accepted, you would have either to break your engagement or he would have to resign..."

I was stunned. Would I make the grades? Everybody I knew had commented on how difficult the course was. But Paul just laughed and encouraged me:

"The Lord has given you to me, Inge, and He will not lead us separate ways again! I am convinced that you will do well on the course. I know that you will indeed be accepted!"

All the same, we decided to put our studies first and not meet during the day, nor sit together at meal times or during chapel hour. The little time we had alone for

each other, therefore, was all the more precious to us. Right after lunch on Saturdays we would leave the camp and take a bus to the country or even to the seaside!

On these outings we got to know each other more and more. These times of sharing were like unwrapping a precious gift you had just received and marveling over its beauty. We marvelled over the gift that was revealed in each other. So at last I heard Paul's own life story.

Right after high school, he had started to study chemistry, "just because I liked it more than anything else and my teacher encouraged me to do so." On weekends and during vacations he worked in the post office to be able to finance his studies himself. Enthusiastically he carried out his experiments - however on his mother's kitchen balcony, as she did not like to see his poison and explosives in the rooms! After an unexpected, yet very successful explosion on the balcony during which his eyebrows and part of his arm were singed, his experiments became more restricted...

It was in these years that the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at Basle University was founded and the Lord used the same man, Dr. Hans B□rki, in both our lives, yet at different times, to bring us into the right relationship with the Lord. From then on, Paul attended many of the IVF camps and weekends, just as I did!

"Isn't it strange that we have such common backgrounds, that we had both been to so many camps and yet never met?" I asked Paul one day when we were strolling through the heather.

"It was as if the Lord wanted to keep us from knowing each other," consented Paul. "And it was better like that. We were neither of us ready for each other then."

In one of those camps, Paul heard for the first time that the Lord had a specific plan for the life of each of His children. He realized that he had never asked the Lord what HE wanted him to do with his life. He had made a selfish, arbitrary choice. Chemistry suddenly had lost all its attraction. Although he already had three years of studies behind him, he abandoned chemistry and turned to languages: English and German.

But somehow the new love for the Lord grew cold. He wanted to escape, break loose. And for that nothing looked better than a language study year abroad.

The University of Edinburgh in Scotland had special courses in English phonetics which attracted Paul. With high hopes for having a great time, he set off - the University had even provided him with a family to stay with and improve his English. Graciously - and full of humor - the Lord checked this fugitive on the first day: his landlord turned out to be a Christian and took him to a meeting the very first night!

"Guess what the subject was about? Backsliding! Right for me!" Paul laughed. That night proved to be the starting point of a new life. The year turned out to be one of spiritual growth and fellowship with Christians.

He returned to Basle with the one burning question in his mind: "Lord, what is the plan that you have for my life?" It wasn't too long before the answer came.

One day a new friend, Dr. Rudy Renfer from the US, professor of missiology studying for a while in Basle, handed him a magazine called "Translation" and just asked him if he had ever heard about it?

From the first page Paul was fascinated. Here was a group of people, totally committed to the one goal: to translate the New Testament into unknown languages. And surprisingly they were mostly Americans with their well-known difficulty in learning foreign languages! Why were the Wycliffe Bible Translators not known to the Swiss who prided themselves on their language learning abilities? He asked others: no, nobody seemed to know anything about this work.

"Lord, if you can't find anybody better equipped than myself to make this work known, I am willing to stand in the breach," he prayed, after having read one day that the Lord was looking for just such a man (Ezek. 22:30). He started corresponding with individual Wycliffe members, collected news and prayer items, edited a newsletter and sent it out to all his friends. He also bought a film depicting Bible translation work, dubbed it with a German commentary, and showed it in various churches - all besides his own studies.

The Lord confirmed these first steps and the number of friends grew. At the same time the conviction in his heart also grew, that this was what the Lord was calling him to do. He became sure that there was nothing more exciting and fulfilling in the whole world than to translate the message of the Eternal God for people who had never heard of Him. He prepared to take the next steps - the linguistics course and Bible training.

Then came the day when our paths crossed. A few weeks later Paul's diary reminded him of an event that had happened three years before, also in Scotland. For several days he had gone hiking all alone in the highlands in order to get away from a bitter experience. He had initiated a friendship with a girl, but had been utterly disappointed. Therefore he wanted to climb the highest peak, just to be alone and talk with God. Now he realized that he had acted again without even praying about it. There on the mountain top he made a solemn vow to the Lord, that for three whole years he would not seek out any girl again.

When he was about to return to Scotland this time, the three years had passed. His diary reminded him of it - yes, he had kept the vow. He was just considering renewing it for the two years of Bible Training, but he couldn't! Thoughts of Inge did not leave him. He started praying for her, planning for her, fighting for her.

And now we were indeed together and the Lord had fulfilled His promise:

"I will give them ONE heart and ONE way
that they may fear me forever,
for their own good and the good of their
children after them." (Jer. 32:39)

Leading us one way and giving us one heart - this had been our prayer, and would always be in the future. At the end of the summer, I was accepted as a candidate of Wycliffe Bible Translators and together we travelled north to spend one year at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow.

Plans for the summer of 1962 took shape. We were asked to be on the staff of the first linguistics course to be held in Germany. So the wedding would have to take place before the Course. What better date was there to choose than the 30th of June, the date of our first meeting in Paris and our engagement a year later? Our families wonderfully co-operated, preparing the feast in Switzerland, while - still in Glasgow - I sewed my wedding dress and Paul duplicated the wedding announcement. Besides 'our' verse of Jer. 32 we had printed beneath our names - 'Joined together by God' to express our deep conviction that we were made for each other and that - whatever hard times would be before us - we would never willingly separate.

My brother, a pastor, performed the wedding ceremony in a beautiful little church overlooking Zurich. We had been allowed to choose the text ourselves - Col. 3:12-16 - and desired that it might serve as an exhortation to all who heard it. Especially important for our marriage were the verses:

"Let the Word dwell richly among you" and
"Forgive one another when you have complaints against each other."



The celebration in a hotel lasted till midnight. Weary but happy we climbed the stairs to our hotel room to be alone at last. Tomorrow we would take the train to a hide-away place - which friends had provided - in the mountains.

By teaching during the German summer course we consolidated what we had learnt before. But we still needed further training in an advanced linguistics course

which we could, however, only participate in the following summer, just before our departure for Africa. Yes, we had volunteered to be sent to Africa and would be among the first to start work in Nigeria.

But what would the Lord have us do during those nine months in between? We needed money to live, so the obvious thing was for Paul to look for a teaching post. But it needed to be a part-time job for we also wanted to visit churches and present to them the task to which God had called us. But where? We could not afford a car, so it had to be in a central part of Switzerland with a good railway connection. Olten! We did not know a single person in that town, but through a newspaper advertisement we were able to find the ideal job as well as a pretty, small apartment, just 5 minutes walk from the railway station!

There in Olten we lived for the next nine months. Paul taught in the mornings in a junior high school, while the evenings and weekends were reserved for travelling to all corners of Switzerland to speak about the work of Bible Translation. During one of the school vacations, we had a special week of meetings with a youth group of the YMCA accompanying us on their instruments. Paul always had a special concern for young people, young Christians who had no plan for their life, who had never asked the Lord what to do with it for His glory. Wasn't the work of Bible Translation the most fundamental, the most fulfilling work? He never talked about ourselves, about our own needs for finances and for prayer partners. Rather, he exhorted each church to pray for at least one of their own young people who would hear God's calling and then to stand behind him or her.

Therefore, it was a great joy to us when the local YMCA leader in Olten one day invited us to his home. Although we lived in the same town, we had never met before. But on the phone he had said that he had many questions about our work.

How we enjoyed answering his and his wife's questions that day! We were sure that we had not only gained a friend but - maybe a future colleague? Tremendous! When we finally dared to ask if he did not think the Lord would lead them into this work too, we were in for the greatest surprise of our life!

"Oh no," he laughed, "we are firmly grounded in the work of the YMCA here. So you don't know why we have been asking all these questions? Our YMCA group here had just been discussing ways of getting more actively involved in mission work. Then we heard about you and we have decided to support you financially according to our means!"

We could hardly believe it. It was a miracle. Here we were, in a strange city, not knowing anyone other than a few high school students who often came to our house, and now the Lord had prepared a circle of friends for us who would commit themselves to us without even knowing us!

Often at the crossroads of our lives, Paul and I have paused to think and ask ourselves: how come the Lord is so good to us, showering his blessings upon us, leading us, correcting us? We have not deserved it. No, it is grace.

But it is two-fold grace. Grace regarding the past: because it flows from generation to generation, from grandparents to parents, from parents to children, wherever they love Him. Hadn't He said that He is a God "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love him and keep His commandments"? (Ex. 20:5)

There is also grace as we look into the future: we have found grace in order to bring God's Word to those who had never heard it. Through that His blessings may continue to flow from new parents to their children and their children's children.

Here we were now in Izi, ready to pass on the fullness of His grace. Would there ever be any who would dare to cut the line of the curse and start the line of blessing for his family?