

An Imperishable Trophy.

After hearing Bronwen Healy speak in September 2008, I decided to buy her book and find out more. She is a profoundly ordinary speaker and very challenging. I say profoundly ordinary in the sense that she tells you her life, not like a motivational guru or well paid convention circuit speaker, but as a real person. It is almost like she is talking to you person to person, and this is the style of the book as well. It is a diary style account of personal redemption and change.

You will find the book challenging and moving as Bronwen relates her story of relatively ordinary childhood, descent into drugs and then prostitution to pay for her habit and those she was caught up with. She comes out of this not through her own efforts, but through the grace of Jesus Christ. I want to highlight two points that I found God brought to my attention as I read and reflected.

1. Forgiveness

What I found so devastating in her story was the incredible realisation that comes when you finally know what wrong actions and behaviour do to other people – especially in this case, her parents. But more than this – like the prodigal son, what amazing love flows from the offer of, and acceptance of forgiveness. Throughout times of stress and worry for her parents, many people, especially her mother prayed and continued to hope. A fragile hope, like the rose the doctor's receptionist gave to her mother when she first went for treatment, but no matter how slim it may appear, there is hope for those who trust in Jesus Christ.

2. The power of Christ to change us.

We live in a society which wants people to use their own power to change. You only have to look in a bookshop to see the variety of material that is focussed on giving you the tools to make your life your own, to step out in your own faith. I find it a constant challenge to humble myself and say "Jesus - you are the one who changes, I cannot do this by myself". Having had several years in a church environment with an office near regular AA and NA meetings, I have had many conversations over the years with their members and have only really begun to learn of the insidious power of drug addiction. Here in Bronwen's story is a deep testimony that shows the power of sin, but more than that, it demonstrates how Jesus is the only one who can break through this power.

At this stage of her addiction and descent Bronwen said she was willing to try anything, especially because of the desperation she saw in her mother, and after the initial treatment she was provided with the right rehabilitation centre and Christian environment and slowly became involved with people who gently introduced her to the person of Jesus Christ, and she came to know Jesus, and love in a joyful way.

There is a controversial aspect to the story and this concerns the use of the drug Naltrexone, an opiate inhibiting drug. She was prescribed this by Dr Stuart Reece, a Christian doctor in Brisbane, who she relates always spoke about Jesus being able to transform people. I found one description illuminating: "He was very loud and outspoken. and started to tell me that the problem was that the drugs had created a big void inside of me that could only be filled by Jesus." (p.81). Dr Reece directs people to a package of help, including the need to be in a supportive and firm environment through a rehab centre. The use of this drug is not without its criticism as Dr Reece has found out himself.

Bronwen's story did not stop with this initial help, or with her own profound life change. It was a long struggle to break free of her addictions, and has still sometimes been a bumpy road, with continuing challenges from her past relationships. As a parent herself now, her wonderful girls provide her with a new connection and understanding of the love of her parents and especially of God.

Bronwen's story continues. She felt led by God to start to share her story with others and the result has been a journey to establish a ministry of hope for others – this is for those particularly in Brisbane, and is primarily oriented to women caught in addiction and the sex industry, and their loved ones. She has a foundation – called and what else could she call it – **HOPE FOUNDATION**.

Hope is help and healing – it aims to "bring liberty to addicts and sex workers through consistent Christ-centred connection and care." Bronwen and Hope Foundation are involved with a variety of ministries with women at different times of the year, and also run drug awareness programmes in schools. There are plans for a mobile lounge ministry – a form of drop-in centre that moves around. Hope is not a simple word, and I hope you take the simple message that hope comes through faith, love and forgiveness.

All this work is not done for Bronwen's sake - it is because of what God has done for Bronwen in Christ. When you realise what you have received one cannot help but offer hope to others.

<http://www.hopefoundation.org.au/>

Trophy of Grace by Bronwen Healy. 270 pp. Self published, but available at selected bookshops, or order your copy - \$25.00 (including postage) at: <http://trophyofgrace.com/>

Peter Bentley
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