

ONE STEP AT A TIME



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To David

Who journeyed one step at a time from Bethlehem to Sydney.

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Thanks too to many people who, having read my first two books, have written to say what a help they have been. *One Step at a Time* is the third in a series that encourages us all to keep walking at a steady pace through the many different doors of life's challenges and opportunities.

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1

PUTTING PEP IN YOUR STEP

In these days of personal trainers and an emphasis on power-walking as a means of keeping healthy we sometimes are told that casual walking is not good enough. Instead we should walk purposefully, with pep in our step!

The colloquial word 'PEP' comes from 'pepper' from which we also get the word 'peppermint'! What do pepper and peppermint do? 'Pepper' puts pep in our food; 'peppermint' puts pep in our mouth!

In December 2004 I had a hip replacement. I had experienced some pain for a couple of years due to arthritis so knew that one day I would have to do something about it. While I was speaking the pain became so bad at one particular conference that I had difficulty walking on to the stage. During that conference I think every one of the 1500 participants asked me at some point if I was all right! When I came home I asked my doctor for a referral to a specialist and discovered that an operation was essential. I am now the proud possessor of a steel hip! The operation was a complete success, but after it, there were two to three months of rest, exercise, hydrotherapy, walking with the aid of two crutches, then one crutch, then a walking stick and then—one day—walking on my own two legs again! The day I walked again unaided was the day I had pep in my step!

What puts PEP in your step? For my friends living in the United Kingdom, spring puts pep in their step. After the long, dreary, cold and wet winter months it is the sight of the first bulb of spring that puts pep in their step. William Wordsworth says in his poem 'Daffodils': 'I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vale and hills and all at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils.' One gets the impression that those daffodils certainly put some pep into Wordsworth's step!

In one of my previous books, *Doors Are for Walking Through*, I mention Hilde who was the Principal of a Bible College in Norway. One day her mother prayed a general prayer for the students at Hilde's college without realizing that there was one particular student that day who needed to know that God was watching over her. The student was very depressed because a number of things had gone wrong in her life and she even wanted to leave the college. Not knowing of this need, Hilde's mother had used Psalm 34:15 to pray that the eyes of the Lord



would rest on the students at the Bible school. That morning in chapel the girl seemed to hear the words 'My eyes are resting on you' and she was encouraged to believe that God knew about her distress. That mother's prayer put pep in the step of a young student who was about to give up her studies.

After I had written that story I sent a copy of the book to Hilde's mother. Some weeks later a letter arrived from the mother to say that the morning she received my book in the mail she was feeling rather low and wondering what difference her life was making in the world. When she read the book and came to the story of how her prayer was miraculously answered, she realized that she was making a difference through her prayers. Her question to me was: 'How did you know that the very day I received the book was a day I needed encouragement?' Of course, I didn't know. Nor did I know how long it would take for a book to travel from Sydney to Oslo, but the Lord knew and the book arrived on the very day that she needed pep to be put in her step!

Can you recall a time when a prayer, a note, a card, a phone call or a visit from someone put pep into your step? Have your prayers, notes, calls or visits put pep into anyone else's step? Probably much more than you know.

Let's look at some bible characters and see who had pep put into their step.

First there was Joshua. We read in Joshua 1:5 of God's promise, '*I will never leave you nor forsake you*', made to Joshua as he was being called to take the Israelites across the River Jordan which was in flood at that time of the year. It was a daunting task for which Joshua felt inadequate. But these words and the words of God from verse 9: '*Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go*' put pep in his step as he embarked on the task.

The women who had come to the tomb where Jesus had been buried certainly had pep put in their step. We are told in Matthew 28:6-8 that they ran when they heard the words from the angel '*He is not here; he has risen just as he said...Go quickly and tell his disciples.*' The call to take the good news of the Lord Jesus to others is such a privilege and Romans 10:15 reminds us that those who take this step of witnessing to others have '*beautiful feet*'!

The two men on the Emmaus road must have had pep put in their step as a result of an encounter with Jesus just after he had risen from the dead. When they realized that it had been Jesus who had been walking with them and eating a meal with them in their own home, their step must have been 'pepped up' from then on.



What about Paul? We often think of the apostle Paul as being very strong and able to cope with all kinds of situations that faced him. But he was also human and we are told in 2 Corinthians 2:12,13 that he was very worried about a letter of rebuke that he had sent the Corinthian church and his mind could not settle until he had heard from Titus who had recently visited the people. Paul needed to know how the Corinthians had responded to his letter and when he came to Troas and could not find Titus there he '*had no peace of mind*' and could not concentrate on his work even though '*the LORD had opened a door*' for him. It wasn't until he came to Macedonia and found Titus and received the news that the believers in Corinth had not been offended and had received his word and were acting on it, that he felt peace again. The coming of Titus put pep in his step!

What about Lazarus? Have you ever thought what pep he must have had in his step after three days of not walking!!

Let me share with you two modern day stories of ways God prompts someone to put pep into another person's step even though they are unaware of the specific need.

The first is of a Romanian woman I met a few years ago. Her name is Jeni and she and her husband were wonderfully used of God during the communist era. Though punished by the authorities for their continued ministries they remained faithful. Today they have a vibrant ministry of preaching and teaching in their church as well as ministries to children and to people who are very poor.

When Jeni received an unexpected letter from me one day she wrote back saying that she had really needed encouragement that particular day. She went on to say that over the years she had no-one to advise her and often wished someone would visit her and pray with her. After a very difficult period when she had faced an important decision and had no-one to talk to but God, she received a letter from her grandfather who lived three hundred kilometres away. He wrote: 'I have felt you heavy on my heart for several weeks and have been praying for you. I believe you have made an important decision and I feel that it is right!' Her step was pepped up, not only because her grandfather was confirming her decision, but because he had been praying for her during her difficult time even though she was unaware of it.

The other incident was told to me by Jean Raddon who was one of the first people to go into Nepal as a nurse/missionary in the early 1950s. The Hindu Kingdom had just opened up to tourists after many years of being closed to the



world. One day, when Jean was home on furlough in Australia, she was on a bus and did not have quite enough money to pay the fare. She almost had enough, but was twenty cents short. As she waited for the bus conductor to come to collect her fare, she decided that she would pay what she had and then get off the bus at the distance covered by the money. As she was trying to work all this out, the woman sitting next to her said: 'Excuse me. I'm rather embarrassed saying this, but God has told me to give you twenty cents.'

How amazing our God is and how wonderful that He can use people to carry out His purposes! That woman's obedience to God's leading certainly put pep into Jean's step that day and it puts pep into the step of all those who hear the story.

Let's see how verses in God's word can put pep in our step. There are some great verses in the Bible that encourage us to keep going even when we feel tired, alone and confused.

- (a) Isaiah 41:10: *'I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'*
- (b) Isaiah 43:2: *'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.'*
- (c) John 14:1,2: *'Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am going there to prepare a place for you.'*
- (d) Revelation 22:7: *'Behold I am coming soon!'*

If you are feeling a bit down, let God's word remind you that you are not alone and that God is there to strengthen you and give you hope even though life might seem hopeless.

To put pep in our step implies action. 'Put' is an action word—it suggests we are doing something.

So:

- Write that letter; make that call; invite that person to coffee; pray diligently for your friends or for a missionary or a person or situation that is on your heart.
- Read a book that will encourage you—and give a book to someone else for their encouragement.
- Read the bible and let God's word make you jump for joy as you realize how precious you are to God.



As we move forward on our journey, one step at a time, may we do so with a lighter step—no matter how hard life is or how lonely we feel—because God is walking with us every step of the way.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Read Psalm 63.

1. Why does the psalmist need God?
What does he expect God will do?
What will the psalmist himself do?
2. How could a Psalm such as this put pep in your step today?
3. Think back through your life and consider how God has met your need and put pep in your step at different stages.
4. Make a conscious decision to put pep into someone else's step this week doing so appropriately and with grace.
5. Use some of the words of this Psalm as you pray to God now.