

Praise for **RESTORING EDEN**

Restoring Eden is a book for our time. The work of the Kingdom of God begins with exactly this. This is a book for forerunners and foundation restorers, for those whose hearts rise and whose gifts are released by the words of Isaiah:

“And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.”¹

God is planning to resurrect the work of His Kingdom in our continent and Sarah’s biblically based, experienced and informed work is an inspired resource. I can’t wait to get it into the hands of the right people!

Roger Mitchell

Founder Passion. Co-author of *The Sins of the Fathers*.

It is wonderful to read a book by one who has lived its content. I have known Sarah and her family for some years; hers is a life that is sold to the will and purposes of God. In *Restoring Eden* she not only presents to us principles and disciplines of how to bring transformation into our communities, she goes beyond knowledge to convey the life of Christ that she is living.

It is a book written to challenge, encourage and stir our faith to know that when we cooperate with God, no community is impossible to change. I’m glad she wrote it.

Arnold Muwonge

Nations Discipleship Enterprise

The Church desperately needs to hear the message in this book. We don’t simply have to put up with the grip the enemy has on our local communities but we have the God-given power and authority to do something about it. I found much here to inspire me, and also much that is new and prompts me to further study.

Steve Goss

Executive Director Freedom in Christ Ministries (United Kingdom)

Restoring Eden is a book to be read, re-read and prayed through. A real story of real people hungry for transformation where they live in the Eden Valley, Cumbria. A story that will both encourage and challenge; for there are no short cuts to following and obeying the living God.

Jane Holloway

National Prayer Director for British and Irish Prayer Association, supported by World Prayer Centre.

¹ Isaiah 58:11.

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INTRODUCTION

It had been a good holiday, a bit wet at times but then this was England and the Yorkshire Dales. Without the rain the Dales just would not have that same lush appearance and appeal. Despite the rain I was reluctant to go home, not just because it was the end of the holiday, but also because God was saying something to me about this 'land of the north'. I stood at the gateway of the campsite and looked out over the dry-stone wall at the circle of high fells that surrounded the small Wensleydale town of Hawes. My eyes fixed on the distant isolated farmsteads and suddenly I heard the voice of the Spirit saying:

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"¹

I knew then that God was calling me and my family northwards not just to enjoy our favourite holiday place but also to pursue His call on our lives. As I responded to God's challenge in my prayer time He gave me a promise from Joshua 14:9:

"The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly."

The Lord led me to read on through the rest of Joshua 14 and on into chapters 15 and 16. Transposing the topographical details given into the north of England I sketched a map in my prayer journal outlining the geographical extent of the territory God was speaking to me about through these passages. It can be roughly described as having the industrial cities to the south, the tribes (or more literally clans) to the north and coast-to-coast. It was in fact most of the rural Pennines sometimes known as the 'backbone' of England. I did not understand in those days what it meant or how we could possibly be effective in working for the Lord over such a large territory, so like Mary, I simply pondered these things in my heart. It was to be five whole years before we actually made the move northwards, which proved to be a valuable period of personal preparation. During that time we had hands-on experience of different aspects of rural ministry and I trained full-time for Christian ministry at a denominational college. In August 1998, having safely settled my mother-in-law, who had been living with us, into a home of her own, we at last made the long journey north to the upper Eden Valley where God had provided us with a home. This beautiful but spiritually barren land was to become the base, focus and learning ground for our ministry.

In the early 1980s experience and events conspired for me to make a decision to walk away from God. I was barely 20, married to a lay-pastor and living in the Manse. Not only was I very young, 80 miles from my real home and adjusting to married life, I also had a very high-pressured full-time job. I found the rural culture completely alien to that to which I was accustomed and found life lived in the 'goldfish bowl' of the village Manse, where my every move seemed to be known by everyone before I hardly knew about it myself, stiflingly claustrophobic. Therefore, when I found that there were other responsibilities and expectations laid upon me as Pastor's wife, some of which were way beyond my age, calling and maturity, as well as those I laid upon myself – aiming to be superwoman and excel in every aspect – I found it all too much. Subconsciously I began to look for a way out. Eventually three years later I walked out of both the home and church.

¹ Romans 10:13-15.

It seemed to me at the time that I was simply cast adrift by the people of God in that area. They did not understand me and were not equipped to minister into my situation. The result was that I walked away from God, hurt, disillusioned and bitter. To be fair, the local Christians had no idea at all how to handle the situation so it was not so much they that failed me, rather it was the church 'system' we were all a part of which failed both them and me. It was almost five years before I acknowledged that God still needed to be a part of my life.

I wish I could say that this sad personal experience was an isolated incident in my life. It was not and neither was it peculiar just to me. Through the hurts, failures and disappointments I have faced, God has placed within my spirit dissatisfaction with the status quo of the very real limitations of English rural church life that I see all around me: small geographically isolated and pastor-less congregations largely made up of the members of one or two families and who are left very much to their own devices. Typically these groups see little growth either numerically or spiritually because itinerant, spasmodic or seriously over-stretched ministry rarely gives the calories needed for growth and maturity into fruitful discipleship. The consequence of this is that the maintenance of the building, tradition and the annual seasonal cycle of Christmas, Easter, Church Anniversary and Harvest subtly replaces the pursuit of God, obedience and the abundant life of the Spirit. I make these statements generally because there are always excellent exceptions. However I state these things objectively with no criticism being meant because I know the people who carry the responsibility for such churches are truly being faithful to what they believe their calling in the gospel to be. But for me *"There must be more than this"* has become my heart's cry. The result of this is that I carry a deep passion to see God's Kingdom come and His will being done right across the rural areas of our land and beyond. In 1993, having been healed and restored from the severe depression that was the consequence of my earlier rebellion, I began to cry out to God that He must do something to impact the rural areas. In response to my own prayer I offered my life to Him to be an agent for change if necessary. He took me at my word.

In 1998 when we arrived in the Upper Eden Valley we really had no idea what God had in store for us to do. There was literally a blank sheet before us. All we had was a dream given to us by a Korean student: she had seen a stone house that stood in breath-taking scenery at the end of a long drive. In the surrounding landscape she saw large boulders and had noted that the house had something very strange about its bathroom! On the day we moved into our first rented home in the area the only local Christian we had met previously called at the house to give us a newspaper clipping of a large Victorian house that was for sale together with an accompanying text.

*"Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations."*²

We did not understand any of it! But we had plenty of time on our hands and no clear direction from God. So although we had no money to purchase a house of our own we felt we had nothing to lose by making an appointment to view the large Victorian house in the newspaper clipping. We realised before we even got to the gate that we had found the location in the Korean girl's dream. God was beginning to get our attention although it was to be almost another two years before we would begin to understand the specific job He had brought us to do in the Eden Valley and beyond.

We began to visit various churches in the valley but being almost entirely as those outlined above we had no sense that we were to join any of them. We settled instead in a

² Isaiah 62:10.

lively Pentecostal Church in Swaledale, which was to become our learning ground in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, responding more to the often tacit but nevertheless felt pressures of family, ministry overseers and supporting home church, we began to plant a church of our own in the Eden Valley which had a very different style and emphasis from that which could be found anywhere in the area. For a while God blessed the ministry but after a year of very hard work, God stepped in and closed it down. The people who were part of the ministry were literally removed from the area one by one. They all moved away so suddenly we were back to square one. It was at this time that something happened that caught our attention and began to make sense of the above scripture from Isaiah.

Spiritually and emotionally confused and exhausted, I went for a weekend to a Christian bed and breakfast in Wensleydale. The proprietors were members of Hollybush Christian Fellowship, Northallerton. They took me along to their Friday night gathering. The speaker was Brian Mills of Inter-Prayer. I came away from the event with two things in my hand: a copy of the *Transformations* video,³ a powerfully inspiring visual documentary of cities around the world where God is at work bringing revival today, and a copy of Brian's book, co-written with Roger Mitchell, concerning the need for national repentance relating to historic sins - *Sins of the Fathers*. I devoured both. For the first time in over a year I *knew* it was God who was speaking to me; even though I did not yet fully understand the nature and implications of His call, I recognised in my spirit *this* was the ministry we had been brought to the 'land of the north' and the Eden Valley in particular for, and what we were charged by God to do. I also realised that God had already been at work teaching us through our previous experience.

In 1993, working as evangelists with *The Fellowship for Evangelising Britain's Villages*⁴, we worked alongside a small rural chapel in Gloucestershire for 18 months. The membership was tiny yet the members were faithful to God in every way. They prayed every week, preached the gospel and had a moderately successful children and women's outreach. They also had a modernised suite of buildings. Yet, mysteriously, no one appeared to remember a single person being converted within the chapel in living memory. We began to voice our questions to God and He directed us to consider carefully events in the history of the life of the church, which was only 150 years old. Three of us began to meet each week just to wait on God for His revelation. After a number of months we had comprised quite a list of sins, most of which could be verified from living memory. Sadly a number of these sins had been done quite publicly in full view of the village. In rural communities people have very long memories; they then pass them on generationally by re-telling the story so that the grudge or prejudice is also passed on. Undoubtedly this was a factor in the situation we were in. In addition some of the sins had even been done within the body of the church membership itself. Copying Hezekiah's example where he cleansed the Temple of the Lord, we held a special communion service. We simply laid the sad list of mistakes and sins the spiritual forebears of the church had made before the Lord. As we did so we pleaded Jesus' atonement for all sin and because of its completeness asked Him to remove the legal footholds the enemy had gained in the life of the church through these sins and actions. It did not seem like very much had happened to those of us who were there but in a very small way we saw the Lord open the door for the Holy Spirit to move in that place for a season. At the end of a year of prayer, mission and evangelism the chapel called its first pastor for 50 years and there followed a period of encouraging church growth for a time.

³ G. Otis, *Transformations*, Global Net Productions, 1999.

⁴ In 2012 the Fellowship for Evangelising Britain's Villages was renamed as Village Hope.

Recalling this personal experience caused me to ponder whether it was possible that, even though the word of God was being faithfully preached in the churches of the Eden Valley, it was falling on ground that had been hardened by the sins of its forefathers. We began to research the history of the area and quickly found it had a very bloody and idolatrous past. The implications of what God was showing me were enormous. Could it be possible that centuries of bloodshed, immorality, idolatry and treacherous acts, many of which we had to assume had gone unconfessed, had given the kingdom of darkness spiritual footholds in our land which were making it and the people who lived off it resistant to God's Word, hard and barren? If this were true of the Eden Valley then could it also possibly be true across the whole rural north of England, even across our nation and beyond?

Leaving aside the spiritual aspect, we recognised that daily life in the Eden Valley was not very representative of the Garden [of Eden] it was named after either! Many of the problems are replicated nationally: broken homes, fatherless children, alcoholism, physical and mental abuse, lack of good pay for hard graft, with many families needing two or three jobs just to survive. Life here, for some at least, seems just plain 'hard' – a daily struggle for survival against an unrelenting breezeblock wall. In 2001 when foot and mouth struck the nation, we saw the Eden Valley experience over 600 cases. The 'Penrith Spur', as the media named it, was completely decimated. The full knock-on economic effects are still being worked out, not only in farming but also in tourism and its associated industries. At that time it was possible to travel from south of Glasgow to Brough, a distance of approximately 150 miles, without seeing a single living animal in the fields around. With the ever-present stench of death carried on the wind we cried out asking God where the fruitfulness was that was supposed to represent the biblical Eden.⁵

With the help of a local Christian lady who, incidentally, recognised the ministry God had brought us here to do before we did, I began to take the *Transformations* video around the area showing it to groups of believers, believing that some would be inspired by what God was doing around the world and begin to believe that He could do it in the Eden Valley too. The response was mixed, ranging from amazement and suspicion, to full-blown apathy and, in one case even anger. Nevertheless we praise God that a lot of good came out of those meetings - two ladies' groups whom God graciously allowed me to disciple with the word of God for almost two years and a fledgling prayer research group which went on to develop over the years into our Community Prayer Cell.

That beginning was in 1999. In the intervening time God has taught us many lessons not least that He loves His people across the rural areas of our land and has a destiny for them as much as for the cities. This destiny has everything to do with the manifestation and demonstration of the power of the gospel of Jesus Messiah and the Kingdom of God to a lost and broken world.

In the last 50 years there have been enormous changes in our nation and there are some things we can no longer assume e.g. that people are familiar with the content of the gospel or have any real biblical basis or standard for morality and living. As year succeeds year we are legislating ourselves further and further away from God's ways. We find ourselves increasingly embroiled in and controlled by the European Union. Such a relentlessly controlling power hungry autocratic world system is clearly described in the Bible which teaches that it will eventually demand our absolute allegiance and severely persecute those of us who refuse to compromise our faith. The result of our choices is that we increasingly face the judgement of God. In February 2005 whilst I was on a week's retreat with the Lord He suddenly placed in my spirit a sense that a great storm was

⁵ Eden in Hebrew means 'delight' or 'bliss'.

coming on the whole world – not just the United Kingdom – and that there were significant preparations that the people of God needed to set in place beforehand. This was not a spiritual storm or a single actual tempest but a whole series of catastrophic seemingly natural events that would increase in severity and effect over a period of years until every aspect of modern society (financial, economic, social, material etc.) had been severely shaken. The result would be the gradual but systematic removal of the many and various ‘props’ we have relied on rather than God for a number of generations. It was, in fact, the unfolding of the end-time judgement of God on the whole world (the Day of the Lord) that is prophesied will precede Messiah’s glorious second coming. That is the bad news. But the good news is that in the midst of the ‘storm’ there is a massive harvest to be brought in and God is at work in pockets all around the nation preparing His church to be those who in the midst of rising spiritual darkness carry His glory to usher in this end-time harvest and the final coming of His Kingdom on earth.

For far too long we have allowed our concept and desire for what the church should be to shape our view of the Kingdom. In reality this means we have often become so absorbed with putting all our efforts into making this event called ‘church’ happen (usually on a Sunday morning), with all the time, preparation and money it takes, that we actually never get around to grappling with what the Kingdom really is and how we can really live it out to impact our world. When we place church attendance rather than relationship with Father God at the centre of things in this way we can very easily slip into being one person on a Sunday, our public face, and someone else entirely at home or at work. This is being double-minded and hypocritical. The result of this is that many of our lives as believers are barely indistinguishable from those of the unbelievers all around us, who are often more compassionate and caring than we are. We are salt that has lost its savour. We hide the light of life that is in us.

A biblical understanding of life in the Kingdom is completely different because it places God at the centre of everything, which is the Hebraic perspective the Bible assumes we understand and follow. As King of His Kingdom what God wants and desires for every aspect of our daily living becomes paramount with the result that it becomes impossible to live episodically any more. As someone once said *‘Jesus is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all’*.

The unwelcome truth is that many of the denominations and church structures we are familiar with have narrowed down our focus and restricted our vision of what the Kingdom is. In reality God is much bigger – unlimited actually – than we have yet seen or experienced and before Jesus returns He intends the whole world to have heard His name and seen His power and glory. For this to happen something seriously has to change because church as we know it no longer cuts any significant amount of ice in our communities. We rarely impact and change society – the contrary is more often true. We are uncomfortable at meeting people where they are. There is a huge clash of cultures. On this basis alone we need to re-think our ministry. But also our outmoded mindsets and structures are simply not going to stand up under the persecution and other challenges that are coming to us soon. God is already dismantling and re-shaping our perspectives of church and the pace of this will only increase until He succeeds in getting our full attention.

A large part of this re-shaping will necessarily include a fresh understanding of the Kingdom of God. The truth is that the Kingdom should shape the nature and ministry of the church, not the other way around. No amount of re-inventing or re-packaging of the church will enable us to fulfil our destiny in these end-times if we remain ignorant of or continue to ignore the dynamic of the Kingdom of God. The church should be a *consequence of the Kingdom* being lived out by us in the normal everyday of life in our

villages and towns. What does this really mean? What does it look like? These were the questions continually asked of Jesus by His disciples and followers. Although Jesus had devoted His entire ministry to teaching and illustrating the Kingdom as well as demonstrating the reality of its presence in and through Him, the disciples appear not to have understood what it was all about until the Day of Pentecost. Suddenly, as the Holy Spirit took control, the Kingdom of God began breaking out everywhere – powerfully anointed proclamation, salvations, healings, deliverances and miracles. It overtook them by surprise. It was chaotic. It could not be boxed in. It made the religious people uncomfortable. Only when it became absolutely necessary did they begin to organise people into local groups. The church then, as it needs to become again, was a place into which new converts were brought to be taught, disciplined, healed, equipped and *sent back out again* – Jesus commanded us to “Go...”⁶

In this book I share my fundamental belief that we are the generation of believers called to the task of ‘preparing the way of the Lord’. In addition to the re-learning of the message of the ‘gospel of the Kingdom’ this also has many other implications: the preparation of a holy bride, the awakening of a slumbering church, the disciplining of an immature church, as well as the gathering and equipping of a mighty spiritual army. These are those who understand their position, power and authority in Jesus and who take their stand against the enemy’s ancient strongholds so that we might see pockets of God’s presence descend to earth establishing strongholds of His Kingdom or ‘mountains of the Lord’ right across the face of the earth today. As we prepare ourselves to face increasingly testing days it is not our churches or refuges per se to which people will run for protection; they will come only if they detect that God Himself is there because it is His presence that is the true stronghold and protection:

“Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.”⁷

As the church rises to meet this end-time challenge the “...*manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.*”⁸

I perceive it to be a three-pronged approach:

Pursue God: Father God wants to re-capture the primary heart love and devotion of His people through worship, intimacy of relationship, consecration, holiness and purity; the Bride preparing herself for her lover the Bridegroom to come.

Stand and pray: For God’s united spiritual ‘army’ across a given territory, knowing and using their Messiah-given power and authority, to listen discern and stand together in prevailing prayer and declaration against the schemes of the enemy at both ground, occult and strategic levels.

Let the living waters flow: For the spiritual freedom gained to then be appropriated by Messiah’s body in the local community through a multitude of redemptive acts: unconditional acts of kindness, love and service, proclamation of the gospel, salvations, deliverances, healings and miracles.

⁶ Matthew 28:19.
⁷ Isaiah 4:5-6.
⁸ Ephesians 3:10.

If really taken to heart by God's people these things would in themselves go a long way towards seeing God's Kingdom come and His will being done in our nation today; little by little we would see the footholds of the kingdom of darkness being replaced by an invasion of the Kingdom of God - 'Eden' being restored at every level of our society.

As we grow closer to Him in intimacy of relationship we are enabled to enter into God's throne-room where He fills us afresh with living water. In many ways we have become broken cisterns that fail to hold water.⁹ But according to Ezekiel's vision [chapter 47] this living water is intended to flow out to water, bring healing and life to all the parched areas around it, not stay confined within the walls of our churches, prayer houses and home groups. How we let the 'living waters flow' is largely a matter of personal and congregational calling, responsibility and obedience to the promptings and direction of the Holy Spirit. In the throne room it becomes possible for God to give us His heart and perspective for people and situations; we hear His will. Absolute obedience is then required to implement it on the earth. This is a day by day moment by moment thing we gradually grow into as we use the gifts we have been given to see individual lives impacted and changed by God's word and power. From 2008 onwards we developed *New Beginnings Discipleship*¹⁰ to equip Gods' people in these things.

This book explores, primarily, the journey of prayer and worship that must necessarily precede such 'seed sowing' that it might bear the maximum amount of fruit for God's Kingdom. This is the process we have walked with God in the Eden Valley. It ploughs up 'hard' and barren ground, pulls out 'weeds', removes 'boulders' and generally prepares the way for 'good soil' – a new spiritual foundation to be laid - in our own lives and in a given area into which we can plant much seed fully believing it will no longer bear fruit spasmodically but continually and increasingly, as Jesus promised, in greater and greater degrees:

"Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."¹¹

The strategy is simple and it begins with this: **if a united group of believers prayerfully identify the various footholds the enemy has gained in each community, 'stand in the gap' in heartfelt identificational repentance and then seek God's face in worship with humility of heart, we have His promise from scripture that He will hear our prayers and heal (restore) our land.**

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."¹²

In *Restoring Eden* I share further about the urgency of the time in which we live, the various schemes the enemy uses against the church to try and prevent God's Kingdom being established and how it is that his influence has become so deeply entrenched in our society over generations. I also share honestly the mistakes we have made and warn about deception, danger and distractions. Finally, I share some very practical helps you may wish to consider working through as you set off on your own journey towards releasing your community through consecration, prayer, worship, research and spiritual warfare prayer and declarations.

⁹ Jeremiah 2:13.

¹⁰ www.newbeginningsdiscipleship.com.

¹¹ Mark 4:8.

¹² 2 Chronicles 7:14.

This needs to be a corporate journey. Therefore my hope is to inspire you to envision others to come along with you. For this reason there is a whole chapter devoted to forming, training and equipping your own Community Prayer Cell as well as a practical group study guide at the conclusion of each chapter. The questions are especially designed to provide you with guide posts as you journey step-by-step along the way.

My primary hope throughout this book is to encourage and inspire you with a vision to see God's Kingdom come and His will being done in the place where you live.

- ❖ Perhaps you feel the traditional church 'system' has let you down but you know in the depths of your heart that God has a plan to reach your area for Jesus.
- ❖ Perhaps you have a burden to pray for your town, village or wider area but do not know how or where to start.
- ❖ Has the prayer group that began so promisingly folded?
- ❖ Do you pray but keep being knocked back and rarely see a breakthrough?
- ❖ Are you tired of just doing 'church' and know in your spirit there must be something more?

Then please read on...

GROUP STUDY GUIDE

- ❖ Identify together what you perceive to be the obvious spiritual and economic needs of your community.
- ❖ In what ways are these issues being helped or hindered by the local expressions of church?
- ❖ Identify together the main 'blessings' and 'curses' of being a believer in your context i.e. rural, town or urban area.
- ❖ What signs of hope, if any, do you see?
- ❖ Discuss together the example given of confessing the sins of the forefathers. Find biblical examples.
- ❖ Consider together Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer: *"...Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."*
 - Share together what you understand this to mean?
 - In what ways is God' Kingdom manifested on earth?
 - In what ways is God's Kingdom manifested in heaven?