

Through All the Changing Scenes

By David Robertson

“The providence of God is like Hebrew words – it can be read only backwards.” So wrote John Flavel.

“Of making many books there is no end and much study wearies the body” says the Preacher (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Some of us hardly ever pick up a book, others, operating on the premise that you can never have too many books, buy far more than we can read. Readers of the Australian Presbyterian will in general be an educated, erudite bunch who are used to being urged to read books – but I hope that familiarity will not breed contempt. I am often asked to write a commendation for books – sometimes I have to refuse because one can’t in all honesty state what the publisher really wants! But in the case of David Ellis’s autobiography, *Through All The Changing Scenes* – (A lifelong experience of God’s unfailing care) it was a delight to be able to enthusiastically commend it.

David is an engineer, a former minister of the Church of Scotland and Director of OMF International UK. He spent much of his ministry in what Brits call ‘The Far East’ (do Australians call it the Near North?!), namely, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. This book recalls his and his wife Adelle’s experiences over 57 years experience in Christian life and ministry – the ups, downs and ultimately the triumph over the greatest enemy.

This is a missionary book – because its about the life of a missionary and his wife. It’s a theology book – because its full of bible teaching about God. It’s a practical book – because it gives us so many life lessons. It’s a devotional book – because it warms the spirit. As Sinclair Ferguson says in the foreword it is “full of the insight of Scripture and the wisdom of experience” .

Each chapter covers a particular scenario and reflects on it, with

feeling, from a biblical perspective. Whether it is a communist revolution in Indonesia, a school shooting in Scotland or the difficulty of dealing with dementia, this is a profound book. Clearly written it expresses deep truths in a simple way – that virtually anyone could benefit from – but especially those of us who are Christians and who sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed and confused by the changing scenes of life.

David’s five year old niece Mhairi, was killed in the Dunblane school shootings. Chapter six, *The God who Suffers*, is a beautiful account of how David and his family responded to this unspeakable tragedy. “When we face pain beyond expression, we do not have all the answers. But we have a God with wounds.”

David is an elder in my old congregation, St Peters in Dundee. He and Adelle came to Dundee at a time when Adelle was already suffering with dementia. It was one of the great privileges of my life to have witnessed the relationship between David and Adelle as outwardly she deteriorated, but inwardly was renewed day by day. Adelle’s funeral was one of the most extraordinary experiential proofs for the truth of Jesus Christ. We celebrated her life, we mourned her death, but most of all we rejoiced that because Christ is alive, Adelle’s resurrection was absolutely guaranteed.

In the final chapter *The Valley of the Shadow*, David shares the memorial their son John gave at the funeral. I have never heard such a moving, intelligent, Christ-centred, realistic and hopeful speech. It’s worth the price of the book alone. “In the days after mum died I received a lot of lovely thoughtful texts, and one very dear friends said your mum is walking with her Lord in the cool of the evening of Eden...and I’m sure she is – sometimes – but I rather more pictured her doing cartwheels of utter, exploding,

uncontainable, happiness in His presence!”

I would highly recommend that you sell your shirt and buy this book (although its not that expensive!). But just in case you need a testimonial from someone you know better, here is

What Robert Benn – Presbyterian Church of Australia Minister – says:

“As you read you, you’ll walk with David and almost feel his pulse beat. You’ll laugh. You’ll ponder deeply your life’s experiences as you measure yours against his. You’ll be spurred on to greater trust in the Way, the Truth and the Life. Enjoy and grow.”

The title comes from an old hymn – a paraphrase of Psalm 34

by Tate and Brady.

*Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still,
My heart and tongue employ.*

Would that we were all able to have that testimony!

Through All the Changing Scenes is published by Christian Focus Publications and is available through all good booksellers.

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Third Space