**Draft questions for Tony Horsfall**

Hi Tony! I have been looking forward to interviewing you as it seems to be that you have had an interesting lift so far! As you know, we have worked together before when I was editor of *Quiet Spaces* and also in my role as editor of *The Reader* magazine. But let’s start at the beginning.

Can you tell me something about your early years and what influence you think they have had on your ministry as a writer and retreat leader (spiritual director as well maybe?)

*I’m the youngest of five children and grew up in Barnsley in Yorkshire. My father worked at the local colliery, as did my two brothers, but it was his hope for me that I would not have to follow in his footsteps. I passed my 11-Plus exam and went to the nearby Grammar School. During my teenage years I was converted through the Methodist Chapel in our village and knew almost at once that God had a plan for my life, so after A levels chose to go to Bible College rather than University. I guess my father was a bit disappointed at my choice of career path, but he soon came to terms with it.*

*As for the writing, I can remember sitting one day in English class and thinking I would like to be a sports journalist, so there must have been something stirring within me even then. Still, I had passed fifty before I put pen to paper (well, got on the computer) with the intention of writing something for publication.*

*Quiet Spaces* had a series of three issues entitled *‘Sit’, ‘Walk’* and *‘Stand’*. I decided on these titles because, as a young Christian, I was very influenced by the Chinese Christian Watchman Nee. I gather you know about his life and works. How did this come to happen and has he been an influence in your own life?

*I think I first came across his book, ‘Sit, Walk, Stand’ when I was at Bible College, but it was later that I began to read more of writings and to grasp what he was teaching. Evelyn and I joined Overseas Missionary Fellowship in 1975 and went to work in East Malaysia. God had given us a love for the Chinese people, and we spent eight very exciting and fulfilling years working there amongst both Chinese and indigenous people. It was in this context that I began to read more of Watchman Nee’s work. I was deeply influenced by his three volume work, ‘The Spiritual Man’, which helped me to understand how as human beings we are made of three parts – body, soul and spirit – and that spiritual grow is largely dependent upon knowing how God works in each of these dimensions. Later on I read and devoured ‘The Normal Christian Life’ which I still feel is a must read for anyone wanting to be strongly rooted in Christ.*

Four of your recent books have come to my attention. These are *Rhythms of Grace*, *Mentoring for* *Spiritual Growth* and *Servant Ministry* and *Working from a Place of Rest. Rhythms of Grace* I gather grew out of your growing personal desire to know God more deeply. A contemplative approach to this did not come easily for you because of your evangelical and charismatic background. What would you say to someone else who had the same background and wanted to take a similar route?

*Two things led me to seek a more contemplative approach to spirituality. The first was seeing friends in ministry experiencing burnout and knowing how exhausted I was myself most of the time. I thought, ‘There must be a better way to live than this’. The second was a growing hunger for intimacy with God that was missing from my life despite my evangelical and charismatic background. I was invited by Joyce Huggett to have a silent retreat at her Centre in Derbyshire. I went reluctantly and with some apprehension, but to my surprise God met me in a deep and life-changing way. I learned the value of stillness, silence and solitude in restoring one’s soul, but I also over time discovered my true identity as God’s beloved child. I see the contemplative dimension as the third strand in the ‘rope’ of a healthy spirituality. Since then I have been passionate about helping others in Christian ministry nurture their inner life and maintain their intimacy with God despite their busy lives.*

*I would say to anyone who finds themselves at such a place in life – either because they experience burnout or because they find themselves longing to know God more deeply – to explore contemplative spirituality. ‘Rhythms of Grace’ might be one place to start as it came out of my own journey and seems to have helped others make sense of what they are experiencing.*

As someone who also does some spiritual direction, or mentoring, with individuals, I recongnise that ones own spiritual life provides a basic resource for this. So the book *Mentoring for* *Spiritual Growth* I guess springs out of your own experience of being alongside individuals. Could you please tell me a little more about this and the retreat work with which I know you are involved?

*My experience in overseas mission taught me the importance of mentoring others as it was instilled within us that our job was to work ourselves out of a job! That is, following the principle of 2Timothy2:2, the aim of Christian ministry is to develop the next generation of leaders. That ideal has always been deeply imprinted on my heart, and as I look back over my life I can see that I have always enjoyed spending time with individuals who were keen to grow in their faith.*

*As I discovered the contemplative dimension and began to lead retreats it became a natural thing to offer individual time to retreatants. I was amazed how hungry people were for this, and how transformative it could be when in the context of time away from normal surroundings people were able to share their deepest thoughts and be truly listened to.*

*Seeing how effective this practice was, and yet knowing how rare it is in both evangelical and charismatic traditions, I wanted to write something that would help people with this background understand why it was important, and then how to go about it.*

*Working from a Place of Rest* is an interesting title which begs some questions before you even open the book! I gather it is about ministerial burn out amongst Christians at all levels, and so this would include Readers. Could you please tell us something about this book, the experiences from which it springs and the advice you would give to people in these circumstances?

*I’m not sure now where the title came from. Did I make it up or was it locked away in my memory from something I had come across earlier? Anyway, it is an expression that conveys the truth that it is God’s work we are involved in, and he will help us to do it. The book looks at the story of Jesus as the well of Sychar recorded in John 4, where according to v6 we find him sitting and doing nothing because he is tired from the journey. He was not afraid to stop and rest, and because he had time to spare he got into conversation with the Samaritan woman. She is deeply touched, and tells the villagers, who also experience a spiritual awakening. A mini-revival takes place because Jesus was apparently doing ‘nothing’.*

*Of course Jesus was actually doing ‘something’. He was listening to the Father’s voice, alive and alert to what he was doing. He saw that this meeting was a divinely orchestrated event, and he responded accordingly to a God-given opportunity. The book reminds us that it is permissible for us to rest on our journey, and that in Christian ministry God is the initiator and we are the responders. This means we can be ‘at rest’ because we don’t have to make things happen; the work truly is God’s, and he invites us to join him in what he is doing.*

The title I am most interested in personally is *Servant Ministry.*  It seems to me that this is an approach to ministry that has long been neglected, and in some cases even seen as a place which should be avoided as it is equated in peoples mind with exploitation and potential burn out. Could you explain more about this understanding of the basis of ministry of any sort, which is what I believe it to be?

*Servant Ministry is a practical exposition of the first of Isaiah’s Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1-9). Here we have a portrait of Jesus as the True Servant, and his servanthood is the pattern for our own. I am deeply convinced that all Christian ministry is based on servanthood – first towards God, then to each other in the Christian community, and then outwards towards the world in its need.*

*To be a servant is not to be a dogsbody or a doormat because we are primarily serving God, not people, so we have boundaries and take care of ourselves. But it does mean we are not to lord it over others but exercise leadership in humility and with gentleness as Jesus did. True servants are secure in their identity, knowing themselves to be loved by God. Knowing themselves to be loved, they can love others freely.*

Finally Tony, what books are you considering writing in future?

*I’m patiently waiting for ‘Deep calls to Deep’ to be released in early 2015. It looks at some of the psalms of lament, those heart cries that we read about in the more difficult psalms. I have chosen four that were written ‘out of the depths’ and which deal with some of the issues people face in their journey with God – failure, depression, unjust suffering, and the loss of God’s presence. I am especially delighted that each psalm is accompanied by a story from real life, stories of people known to me personally who have had to walk some difficult paths but who discovered God was still with them even when they were ‘in the depths’.*

*The subtitle for the book is ‘Spiritual formation in the hard places of life’ which expresses my conviction that God will sometimes lead us along some difficult paths so the life of Christ may be more fully formed within us. I think this message is urgently needed in the Western church where many see faith as an insurance against pain and discomfort, and quickly blame God if things don’t work out well for them.*

I think we need a short paragraph about things relating to your retreat leading ministry at the bottom in case this is of interest to Readers, and perhaps a reference to a blog / website if you have one.

*Tony Horsfall is a retreat leader based in Yorkshire who leads retreats at a variety of places in the UK. To find out more about his retreats see his website at www.charistraining.co.uk*