

# On the Road to Adelong

By Craig Manners

When I was a boy of about twelve I remember walking down a street in Kalgoorlie thinking about God. I remember thinking that it was hard to believe in something which you couldn't see, and I thought that surely the only way I could ever believe in God was if He showed Himself to me.

I didn't think about Him much after that early thought, that I can remember, in fact the following 20 years were really pretty thoughtless years in many ways. I was lost in pursuit of fleeting and selfish things such as money, personal glory, pleasure and career. Looking back, my world was pretty empty, shallow, restless and meaningless. People around me were mostly very self-focused and selfish and no-one seemed to have any answers, or were doing anything which had any real meaning or purpose. Relationships were shallow. Conversations were fairly banal. Life was a façade.

Then in late March 1998, aged 32, God led me to respond to a leaflet in my mailbox and attend a Good Friday service at the local Presbyterian church.

At the time my mother had just been diagnosed with throat cancer and I was very worried about losing her. In the week leading up to receiving this flyer invitation, to come and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I was reading a new-age book called, "The Road Less Travelled and Beyond" by M. Scott Peck. This book, which mentioned God, combined with my worries about my mother dying, got me thinking about whether there was a God and what would happen to my mum if she died. It was almost the day after I had these questions that I noticed the flyer in amongst the junk mail I normally put straight into the rubbish bin next to the letter boxes.

That Friday (27th March 1998) I went along to the church and heard Prof. Douglas Milne preach about Jesus. I didn't really understand much of what he said I must say, but I remember being impressed that they didn't ask for money! I was planning to slip out the back quickly and quietly at the end of the sermon, as the whole church thing was very foreign to me, but a fellow named Steve was blocking my way at the end of the pew and wasn't going to let me out without a friendly chat!

Steve was indeed very friendly and made me feel instantly welcome and at ease. Providentially I was a stockbroker and he was an active investor in the stock market, investing in the same small-cap resources market I specialized in. So we had plenty to talk about.

He introduced me around to some of the congregation and I was surprised at the number of young people there, how normal they were (they were not at all weird as the media painted Christians out to be), how friendly they were and the genuine inquiry going on into thoughtful, deep and weighty topics. The environment was markedly different from the world I was used to where conversations were of a very selfish and superficial nature.

Intrigued, I went back on the Sunday and I was invited to a congregational lunch in the manse at which I was again impressed by the friendliness of the people and the conversations I overheard around me and was involved in. I returned the following Sunday and on my way out after the service I was asked by a young lady if I had a Bible. I did not,

and so I was promptly offered one as a gift.

I read this NIV Bible nearly every night for the next few months, returning to church every Sunday filled with many questions, which were answered freely by anyone I asked, but mostly by a comedian named Bill Medley, without hesitation or offence. I avoided the prayer meetings and Bible studies I was invited to, as it was weird to me then to sit around in a circle and do that sort of thing.

I had obviously heard about Jesus Christ but thought he was a myth, so I was quite amazed when I discovered that he was a real, historical person. I was even more amazed to hear that he was God, come to live among us and to die for us, to take the punishment that we deserve upon himself so we could be set free, be reconciled to Him and have eternal life instead of eternal death which we deserved because of the way we lived our lives.

It didn't take much convincing to understand that there is something pretty wrong with our world, with all the suffering, sickness, broken relationships, restlessness and then at the end of all that just death. What took a bit longer was to understand and accept the solution offered by God to this fallen world we live in (Jesus' death on the cross, dying in place of His people, and then His resurrection from death, revealing His victory over death for His people).

Human pride gets in the way at this point, as we argue with ourselves that just because this is not how we would do salvation that it can't possibly be true!

I decided to read other books too to hear the side from evolutionists and secular scientists, but none of them could satisfactorily deal with the big questions I was thinking about, such as, "Where did we come from?"; "How did the world begin?"; "Why is there so much brokenness and suffering?"; "What is life all about?"; "Where do we go when we die?"; "Is there a God?"; If so how can we know anything accurately about God?"

This went on for about six months and then God opened my eyes, turned the lights on so to speak, and enabled me to see the truth about Jesus on the evening of the 23rd September 1998, after listening to a sermon by Kel Richards on a tape which someone at church had given to me. It wasn't just that taped message, it was a culmination of the previous six months of seeking, and it all hit me with an overwhelming effect that most memorable evening.

Having at that moment put my trust firmly in Jesus as my Saviour, Lord and King, my life has never been the same since. This was without a doubt the best thing that has ever happened to me, the most defining event in my life.

BUT... from a worldly point of view it was to shake my world, my life, my relationships, my career, my reputation, my hopes, plans and dreams so violently over the coming months and years, in such a way I would not have thought possible at that time.

I assumed that in becoming a Christian, God was now about to bless me abundantly, the way I thought he should bless me, that He would answer my selfish prayers for worldly success! And, in a manner, for a time, He did. I will explain as we go.

I was a very slow, stubborn and worldly new Christian, wanting what I thought were the best of both worlds, and thinking that Jesus was going to make me more successful financially. A

spiritual battle ensued for the following year which mammon appeared to be winning. From about March 1999 I drifted away from God and church as I became very financially successful and increasingly busy.

I was working at the time as a Senior Client Adviser at a financial services firm, Hartley Poyntons Limited in Collins Street. I had moved over from Perth in January 1997 with Hartley's to help open a Melbourne branch of the company. My whole world was one of seeking earthly treasure. As you could imagine, some of my first prayers were for financial success!

In 1999, with the advance of the amazing new world of the internet, with all the economic possibilities of having a world connected as one big marketplace, start-up internet companies were being formed in days with just a concept, listing on stock exchanges around the world and being valued at billions of dollars within months. It was an amazing time, and I was getting right in the thick of it.

Although I seemed to be having my prayers answered with material abundance I was not satisfied at all deep down, and while not going to church for about nine months, I continued reading the Bible most nights, but basically living an unchanged life.

Temptations were coming at me thick and fast and I became confused about my life as I drifted further into worldly success and empty living. God seemed to be answering my prayers, for my idea of success, with my work during the internet boom, and by the end of 1999 my investment portfolio balance had lots of numbers in it and rising fast. Yet the higher these numbers got the lower the "genuine life satisfaction" index went.

In early 1999 I sold an internet start-up company, eSmart.com.au Pty Ltd, my brother and I had founded not long before, focused on remote online back-up of data, to an ASX listed company called Adelong Consolidated Gold Mines N.L. for about \$500,000 worth of shares (and five million 20c exercise price ASX listed options) in Adelong, valued on the ASX at the time at 4c and 1c each respectively.

The board of Adelong were impressed with how the market reacted to this acquisition, as the shares went straight to 12c. They invited me to join the board and formulate a new corporate strategy for them to change Adelong's direction to become a venture capital company in the internet sector, to invest in lots of start-ups like eSmart. I raised \$1m of new capital for Adelong at about 8c per share to fulfil our board approved Strategic Plan.

The new capital came from a successful group of European investors in Monaco, Vienna, Geneva and Berlin who had recently had major success in investing in and promoting similar moribund Australian gold explorers turned internet companies. They quickly made Adelong very well known in Europe and the shares went to 45c pretty well just on the back of the market becoming aware that they had been buying Adelong shares.

This group of individual investors had acquired over 50% of the shares in just a few weeks and were preparing Adelong for a major rise on the back of what similar internet companies were doing around the world (i.e. going from market capitalizations of a few million to hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars – in hindsight it was one of those unusual periods of pure madness on stock markets around the world as the start of the internet turned the world of commerce on its head).

By late December 1999, early January 2000, investor forums across Europe were furiously

talking up Adelong and comparing the company to multibillion dollar Softbank, a Japanese internet venture capital investment company.

I became very busy, travelling a lot, had a weekly column in the Age newspaper called "Retrospectus," was mentioned a lot in the media regarding Adelong as well as a string of other new internet start-up enterprises I was involved in starting (some in Melbourne and some in Sydney) and everything seemed to be going well. I even went to Indonesia in September 1999 and saw Adelong get a mention on the CNBC business channel on the hotel TV!

At the height of the internet boom I had personal assets worth approximately A\$8m and thought it was all real and that it would all last forever. I still had a big empty feeling inside me though and I was restless, unsatisfied and unable to push this feeling away, not with busyness, nor exhaustion and lack of sleep, nor an investment portfolio worth millions.

Then, (thankfully, in hindsight), God acted in late January 2000 by allowing several aspects of my life to be suddenly disrupted, all within a period of one week, quite violently, completely unsettling me. This led me back to church in February 2000 where I have been in regular attendance ever since, growing in my faith in Jesus and in my contentedness and satisfaction with life.

These several aspects included my mum's deteriorating health, and an overwhelming busyness with my stockbroking career and Adelong, all the start-up ventures I was juggling, the media attention, travel, unhealthy living, increasing exhaustion, and trying to manage a proposed change of career at Tolhurst's moving from the dealing room to their corporate department being suddenly disrupted by some turmoil which basically imploded the whole corporate department in January 2000 (I am still not sure what happened there but it pretty well disbanded just as I was about to move upstairs).

In the midst of what I look back on now as a time of possible nervous exhaustion I was emailed a list of 10 interview questions by a German internet chat-site journalist the day I arrived back in Melbourne on the midnight-horror flight from Perth. This email was accompanied by phone calls from the European investors in Adelong encouraging me to be very positive with the interview, which they were already aware of, and to do the interview quickly. So, naively, I was and I did. The interview mostly just brought together all the genuine activity at Adelong, and all the news already announced by the Adelong board to the ASX over the previous few months of separate ASX announcements, in one announcement which more fully informed the market and painted some genuine but in hindsight overly enthusiastic scenarios based on the then current exuberant state of the internet revolution.

Normally investors don't react much when obviously biased company directors are positive about their company's prospects, so it was difficult to tell whether my interview or the general internet boom euphoria affected the shares over the coming two weeks, but they continued their rise from 4c, 10 months earlier, 43c at the time of the interview, and went up to 63c and then to \$1.40 two weeks after the interview. I was too busy to do much about it but sold a few shares on the way up, trying to be prudent, given that I had much of my wealth tied up in Adelong shares and was not being paid by Adelong for working for them.

At the end of January 2000, as the shares hit \$1.40 and ASIC were coming under pressure to act on the sky-rocketing share prices of most internet related companies, it was suggested

that my already public interview should have been released to the ASX. The spotlight was shone on Adelong and to appease the regulator, and deflate the intense media attention, the board of Adelong suggested I resign, not for any wrong-doing but solely so as to take the spotlight off Adelong. So I did, but it had the opposite effect. You can read about what happened next in: "[The Adelong Refinery](#)."

Over the following months and years as my career, reputation, future worldly prospects and bank balance all lay in ruins, I saw God at work, persistently and gently over some time, revealing more precious things as He refined off the enormous amount of dross in my life to expose those things which are of true value.

So, twenty years after my boyhood thought about God, He did show Himself to me, just not the way I thought He should. Just as we can't see oxygen yet we know it is there, so too we can't see God with our eyes but He is here. And fifteen years after the upheaval of January 2000 I look back with thankfulness to God for unravelling my restless and empty world, even though He needed to do it so violently, and for so lovingly chastising me so as to correct my course and refine me, and for revealing more and more of Himself to me over the years and allowing me to find my true rest and fulfilment in [Jesus](#).

"With what mercy does He overthrow their prospects of worldly wealth and bring down their hopes of earthly power and greatness that He may give them the heavenly treasure ... With what love does He ruin their reputation among men, breaking in pieces their good name which was their idol that He may show them the vanity of human praise, leading them to desire the honour that cometh from God and to know that in His favour is life and that the light of His countenance is the very sunshine of heaven." Horatius Bonar.