



musings of a clergy child
growing into a faith of my own

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Clergy child's lament

*I didn't choose it
 you called my parents to it
 You made a place for me
 where I thought there was none
 Out of my comfort zone
 and into your calling.*

*'Incarnational ministry,' they call it
 'Invasion of personal space,' I respond
 My house is not my own
 my time is other people's
 my life is a sermon illustration
 I am to be an example to all
 I apologise for things that are not my fault
 I welcome in the stranger
 I make small talk with anyone
 'Tea or coffee? We have plenty'
 is my battle cry.*

*I smile politely at the personal comments
 about my weight
 my hair
 my intelligence
 my family
 my life.*

*I will share anything with them
 including my parents
 my dog
 my sofa
 my home
 my life*

*I will share anything with them
except my mug.*

*I didn't choose it
you called my parents to it
You made a place for me
where I thought there was none
Out of my comfort zone
and into your calling.*

*To share everything
even when it hurts
To take what you have given me
every last bit of it
my parents
my dog
my sofa
my home
my life
even my mug.*

*To lay it at the foot of the cross
and surrender it all back
to you
Into your hands
to use as you will
to bless
to heal
to restore
to bring hope
joy
peace.*

*And to trust
that in all things
you will provide for me*

*a safe place
to hide
to cry
to scream
to rant
to question
to trust
to be angry
to be grateful
to believe.*

*I didn't choose it
you called my parents to it
You made a place for me
where I thought there was none
Out of my comfort zone
and into your calling.*

Introduction

If you are a clergy child: welcome, friend. Kudos to you; I know how it feels: both my parents are ordained. If you're not a clergy child: welcome to you too. It's super-lovely to have you here.

This book isn't just for clergy children. If you're someone who grew up in a Christian home and therefore think that your testimony or faith story isn't particularly interesting; if you're someone who spends time questioning whether God has forgotten you in the shadow of your parents' calling; if you're uncertain whether or not you believe because you know it all with your head but you're not sure whether your heart has quite caught up yet; or if you're just a bit curious about what it's like to be a clergy child and want some fun anecdotes and amusing stories: this book's for you.

If, on the other hand, you're looking for a deep theological exegesis of ministry life, a biblical commentary, a fiction book about an imagined life in ministry, or the answers to all your questions about God, then I'm afraid you're going to have to put this book down and keep browsing. But whoever you are, whatever your story, wherever you fall on the 'ministry spectrum', or even if you don't fall on it at all, welcome.

I wrote that opening poem, 'Clergy child's lament', on a really bad day, when I was sick of feeling as if God had forgotten me in the calling of my parents, and the words of it have stuck with me ever since. And feeling forgotten is not just the case for those of us with clergy parents; if you've grown up in a Christian home, with Christian parents, going to church and praying before bed and knowing Bible stories off by heart, you can often feel a bit uninteresting. You can sometimes feel forgotten by God. Compared with friends who have remarkable conversion stories, moments of clear revelation or a miraculous healing, your 'I grew up in a Christian home and here I

am, still a Christian today' testimony can feel a bit, well, boring. It can feel as if you don't really have much to offer the church, that you're not very interesting, and that God only cares about you because of who your parents are and what they do.

This isn't true.

I can't promise that this book will convince you otherwise, but I pray that as you read its words, God will speak to you about how your story is powerful because it is yours, and because he wrote it with you. I pray that his delight in you would silence the lies of comparison as you look to those people you think are 'more interesting' than you, and that instead you would grow in an understanding of your unique and precious role in God's family. I pray that as you journey through this book, however fast or slowly you read it, God will show you how much he adores you, and how he died and rose again for you. I pray that he would reveal to you that you are his beloved child, not because of who your parents are, not because of what you've done or haven't done, but because he made you and has loved you since the beginning of time.

This book is based on a blog, so it may not be set out in the way you might expect. It isn't a continuous-prose, chapter-book kind of deal, but more of a selection of short stories, tips, letters, poems and musings about life, faith, God, ministry and growing up in the church. It's the kind of book you could potentially sit down and read in one go, but I think maybe it's better just to dip in and out of it when you want to. Have a browse of the contents page, find something that seems relevant to you for the day and read that. Or use the 'Musings' section as part of your daily devotions, as a reflection on a piece of scripture or as a springboard for your own writing. This book can be used however you want, in whatever way works best for you. Plus, should you fall on hard times, I've heard that paper is edible, so you could always use it as an emergency food source.

You'll find three sections in this book: tips, letters and musings. The tips are from my blog series, 'Tips for clergy children'. They're about growing up as a clergy child, and they range from the sublime to the ridiculous. They are there primarily to (a) show you that I'm a real person, and (b) let you know that you're not alone in the madness of growing up in a Christian home. I hope they make you laugh and broaden your understanding just that little bit more of what it's like to grow up in ministry.

Next, you'll find the letters section. These are more personal, more pastoral, and they're made up of pieces of advice for particular scenarios you're most likely to come across, particularly if you're growing up in a Christian home or your parents are in ministry. They're advice from my own experience and my own story, or lessons that I've learnt because God has taught them to me at a specific time.

Finally, there are the musings. These are spiritual reflections, poems and creative writing. They're there to help you understand a little more of who God is, using my own journey as a model. They're there to remind you of those incredible truths that you've grown up being taught, to show you what a privilege it is to be growing up in a family who introduced you to God at a young age, and to inspire you to think more deeply about what your journey looks like and what you might be able to offer the church.

As a clergy child, you see, I wasn't given a choice about the life of ministry I was born into. As I've written this book, I've been asking myself: If I had the choice, would I do it again? Would I go through a childhood of being a clergy kid, a lifetime of incarnational ministry, again? Given the chance, would I have chosen this for myself? As I started writing, I didn't have the answer.

But then I found myself on a spontaneous beach trip with one of my closest friends. You could tell it was spontaneous because I was wearing skinny jeans. Everyone knows that wearing skinny jeans to the beach is a really stupid idea, because it's high-on impossible to

roll them up for paddling in the sea. But it was warm and the sea was so inviting that I threw caution to the wind and went in anyway. I left my sandals on a rock and picked my way delicately over the pebbles towards the water's edge. Within minutes of my toes touching the cool water, I had underestimated the size of an incoming wave and the bottom of my jeans had been soaked by the sea.

I was a bit annoyed, I'll be honest with you. I had a two-hour car journey home ahead of me, and my jeans were wet. No one likes wet jeans, especially when they're skinny jeans and it's salt water that has soaked them. But then, before I could spend too long dwelling on the frustration of my damp jeans, my attention was drawn to how much I was enjoying simply paddling in the ocean. The feeling of the sand between my toes, my heels sinking into the damp ground as the waves went in and out over my feet. The cool water somehow taking the heat away from the rest of my body, because, for some reason, when your feet are cool, the rest of you is cool. It brought back memories of childhood holidays spent by the sea, swimming with my family and sunbathing with a good book. It reminded me of the time away that my family took to escape the madness of ministry—rarely outside the UK, because a clergy stipend just doesn't allow for exotic beach holidays—and how it was always an incredibly precious time for the four of us.

Despite the wet bottoms of my jeans and the long car journey home that lay ahead of me, then, I was glad I'd gone paddling. And so I realised: *I would rather have wet trousers than not to have gone in the sea at all.*

I think that's a metaphor for growing up in ministry, for being a clergy child, for learning how to grow into a faith of my own. I would rather have the inconveniences, the pain, the difficult memories, the frustrations and the scars of growing up in ministry than to not have been there at all. The joys far outweigh the trials. The laughs exceed the tears. The pleasure is ever greater than the pain. The stories of redemption speak louder than the moments of despair.

Whoever you are, wherever you find yourself in life, whatever your situation, and however wet the bottoms of your trousers are, I hope you enjoy this book. I hope and pray that it inspires you, encourages you and teaches you something of God and his love for you. I hope that you will discover just how worthwhile your wet trousers are in the light of the joy, excitement and grace you get to see and live in daily as the child of those in ministry. I hope that you will come away from this book ever more aware of the privilege it has been to grow up in a Christian home, despite the mess. But ultimately, I hope and pray that you will find in this book an encouragement to let your faith grow ever deeper as you journey with the God who has called you by name and made you his own, no matter what.

Here is love

For when love hurts

It seems so easy to sing some old hymns or the modern worship songs... the tunes roll off your tongue and you so often forget to pay attention to the words you are belting out at the top of your lungs.

And yet, when you stop to listen to what you are singing, it can really hit you, right in the gut. You realise that if God took you at your word (or your song), you might well find yourself in quite an unexpected and difficult situation. This struck me very clearly a few years back, as I sang 'Hosanna' by Hillsong United. One line in particular got to me: 'Show me how to love like you have loved me.'

The thing is, though, no one tells you how hard it is to love—to really love, to really care, to really feel; to care so deeply, utterly, completely and totally about someone that you don't have the words for it any more. This is not love as the world tells it; this is not erotic love or platonic love; this is a love that does not come from a human heart. This is a love that comes from Love himself—from God himself.

But this love—this deep, honest, raw, painful love—hurts. It's hard. It hurts to see someone you love in pain, in turmoil, in confusion. It hurts to see them bound by lies and false beliefs and anger and memories and unforgiveness. It hurts to see someone you care for so deeply believing lies about themselves, hurting themselves, hating themselves, putting themselves down, denying themselves, running away from themselves and never truly looking at themselves, because they're scared of what they might see.

Love hurts. Real love is painful. It moves you to tears. It moves you to sighs and 'groanings too deep for words' (Romans 8:26, ESV). It

moves you to a prayer and a cry so deep, you don't know what you're asking for, but you know that it's needed. But this love—this painful, deep, honest love—comes as a shock. Love isn't meant to be painful, you say. Love is supposed to be fluffy and warm and fuzzy. But love was never easy. Look to the cross. Look to the ultimate expression of love, to Love himself dying on a cross out of love for you.

And this, this is the love that God calls us to have. This bloodied, beaten, torn-down, humiliated, unspeakable, painful, beautiful love for others is the love that God gives us when we ask for it. When we ask God to 'show me how to love like you have loved me', he may well give us what we ask for. Not a love for every single person—no one human being can bear that burden; God bears it for us—but maybe just for a particular group of people: the lost, the broken, the widows, the orphans, the survivors, the victims, the perpetrators, the prisoners, the hungry, the sick, the mentally ill, the dying, the lonely...

Or maybe God will give you love just for one person, just that one person who everyone finds it so hard to understand, but who you cannot help but love—that one broken, hurting, lost, scared person who needs God's love more than you could ever know. God may call you to show them that love. Imagine what a difference we could make in the world if we were each able to love just one person like this—to see one person as God sees them, and love them with a mere fraction of the love that God has for them.

Never will we be able to fully understand the depth of God's love for us and for those around us, but the moment when we begin to love someone in that deep, painful, God-given way is the moment that we take one step closer to understanding God's extraordinary, incomparable love for them and, in turn, for us as well.

If you feel that this love is tearing you apart, that it's too much for you to bear, look again to the cross. Look to Love, dying on the cross. Know that his power is made perfect in weakness and that he loves you with an everlasting love. Even at those moments when it feels

as if someone's life depends on you loving them, taking care of them and supporting them—when it feels as if you're holding their life in your hands—remember that 'underneath are the everlasting arms' and those arms will never fail.

Don't forget that the God with these everlasting arms loves that person even more than you do. He has the capacity to love them more than you can ever imagine. Even though it might hurt to let them go, even though it may feel as if you are dropping them into the unknown, just know that the hands that are holding yours, even as you are holding them, are strong and mighty to save, and they truly will never fail.

Do not be afraid of this love, this deep, honest love. There is no fear in love. It hurts, but it's worth it. As someone once said bitterly to me, 'Pain is the price you pay for caring.' 'Yes,' I responded, 'but it's worth it every single time.' One day, God willing, you will see the result of this small amount of 'God-love' that you have shown. You will see the day when the butterfly unfurls from the cocoon, when the flower finally opens its petals and turns, in full beauty, towards the one who made it. He is the one who will then make it whole with his perfect, complete, deep, honest, painful, all-consuming, never-changing, eternal love.

Real love hurts. Real love is not easy. Real love comes from God, the one who is wholly love. But peace comes from God too, as do strength and refuge. Do not be afraid to ask God for his love for someone, but do not do so lightly. Love is a burden, but it is also freedom. The freedom that comes with loving someone, or with being loved by someone, cannot be explained or written off. It is scary, and it is hard, and it hurts, but do not be afraid of it. Perfect love—real love, God's love, God himself—casts out fear. So fear not, for he is with you, especially as you love. After all, we love because he first loved us.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Vicarage life can be exciting, hilarious, scary, surreal and delightful... and that's just one day! Nell Goddard writes honestly and openly about the ins and outs of growing up in a Christian home, from her experience as the daughter of two vicars. With hilarious anecdotes, tough lessons and spiritual reflections from wrestling with faith, this book charts what it's like to live in the goldfish bowl of a vicarage, grow up in the shadow of your parents, lose your faith and find it again. With both rewritten blog posts and brand new material, this collection of tips, letters and musings will appeal not just to clergy children and their parents, but also to teenagers growing up in Christian homes, and to those who want to know what it's like to live a life of ministry you never really asked for.

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Nell Goddard studied Theology at Durham University and is now Culture Projects Leader at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Both her parents began training for ordination when she was just six months old. Since then her family have lived all around the country and been part of a spectrum of different ministries, from Oxford college chaplain to academic theologian to vicar of a central London parish. She has an older brother and a chocolate labrador, Bramble. You can find Nell's blog at www.musingsofacleergychild.wordpress.com.

Cry. Laugh. Read this wonderful, precious book. Bless you, Nell, and thank you.
Anne Atkins, novelist and mother of five clergy children

Nell Goddard's first book has it all—biography, poetry, theology, therapy, philosophy. It will have you laughing, crying, wincing and sighing aloud. It's wonderful. Her book, so filled with grace, will do good to your soul.

Simon Ponsonby, Pastor of Theology, St Aldates Church, Oxford

Nell writes from-the-heart with wisdom and wit, but also great realism, which means that this will hopefully be a timely read for many.

Mark Meynell, Europe and Caribbean director for Langham Preaching

I am so glad this book has been written. Nell's reflections on what it is like to live in a vicarage are always insightful, sometimes deeply moving, very honest and often funny. She shows that being the child of a vicar (or two) has its challenges but can be ultimately a life of faith, hope and joy.

Emma Ineson, Principal, Trinity College, Bristol



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