

Program No:
For Broadcast:

TITLE Cracked Mud and Starry Nights

Pastor Trev Keller

It was late one hot January night when the phone rang.

"Hello, this is Caroline," came the strongly accented voice at the other end.

"Caroline," I replied a little non-plussed.

"Yes, Caroline from Germany! Your daughter Nicci stayed with us for a few days on her school trip to Germany last year."

"Oh, Caroline," I replied. "It's good to speak with you. Nicci told us about staying at your house. Thank you for having her."

Caroline then proceeded to tell me that she'd just finished her final year at school and wanted to come to Australia. She asked whether she could stay with us and whether I'd be able to get her into a school somewhere for a while so she could get some idea of what an Australian school was all about.

When I caught my breath I replied that she could probably stay with us, and I'd try to see about a school.

To which she replied, "I've got my flight booked and I'll be arriving in Adelaide in 2 weeks."

To say that we were in a state of shock and turmoil would be an understatement. We only had a small house, so we decided to take up the offer of a friend's caravan. Cheryl and I would shift out into the caravan in the back yard for 2 weeks and free up a bedroom in the house. A phone call to the principal of the school our girls were going to provided a very positive outcome.

Two weeks after the phone call Caroline arrived into the 40 degree heat of an Adelaide summer. She didn't know what hit her, and fortunately for us neither did we at the time.

The two week stay turned into 5 months! And we were soon to discover that this pleasant, friendly young lady was actually very disgruntled with life. Her dad had been a member of Germany's world cup soccer team. Her mum was a model, and her brother had been brilliant at school and was now very successful in his chosen profession.

And Caroline? Well Caroline believed that all her parents wanted from her was to live up to their expectations. So, by her own admission, she decided to do the opposite. Consequently she had no real purpose to life and living, saw any challenge put before her as something to be avoided, and did her very best to avoid succeeding at anything. Even to the point of intentionally being quite the opposite of her glamorous model mum in her appearance and dress.

Well, her first days in Australia were spent on the floor in the lounge in front of the air conditioner trying to somehow adjust to the heat. Gradually she ventured a bit further out into the world around her. We showed her around our neighborhood and went to the beach which was only 20 minutes walk from our house. We took her to some of our favourite places in Adelaide, but she showed little interest. She started going to school and was linked up with the teacher who had taken a group to Germany and was himself of German descent, but came home each day disinterested and morose.

We decided on a trip to the Flinders Ranges. Caroline slept all the way up and all the way back. No matter what we did or where we went nothing was as good as Germany. I can remember saying to Cheryl one night as we cuddled up to keep warm in the freezing cold caravan we had in the back yard, "Why the heck doesn't she go back to Germany."

But in the light of a new day things never seemed quite as bad as they were the night before, so we persisted. She'd come to church with us, which was a new experience for her. The girls would include her in everything they did with their friends. And Cheryl would continue to take her under her wing and treat her in the same motherly way that she did our daughters.

Then one day the German teacher told Caroline about a trip that another school was planning. It was a camel trek from Lake Torrens in the north of South Australia to the Gawler Ranges in the west of the state. Caroline decided then and there, that was what she wanted to do. We were amazed. A Camel trek was probably the last thing we thought she would do. Little did we know what a difference it would make to her life and her attitude.

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Two days into the trek, she told the leaders that she wanted to go back. But she was told that she had one of two options. She could go back to the starting point at Lake Torrens, but it was two days walk and she would be doing it on her own. Or, she could continue on with rest of the group to the Gawler Ranges. Caroline chose the second option – she stayed and she completed the trip. She told us when she got back, that it was the first time in her life that she had ever completed something.

She was transformed. The time riding along on the camel gave her time to think, and then laying in her swag at night looking up at the stars, which she'd never seen in her life before, was the catalyst for change. There was a real spring in her step and the bright cheery personality that was the real Caroline emerged.

What brought about the change?

When she got back she showed us countless photos she had taken of the cracked mud of dry clay pans. She said lying out at night looking up at the stars was just breathtaking; each star twinkling – thousands of them – but each star separate and each star special; each star an important part of the whole grand and spectacular picture.

Caroline saw in the cracked mud something of her own life. A life that was dry and empty, with no real purpose and plan to it. Parched for the love and recognition she craved from her parents. Longing for them to see her for who she was rather than who they wanted her to be.

And when she looked up at the stars she realized that they were all different but all important, they all had a twinkle about them, and all of them were special in their own right. She realized that she was loved; loved by the God she heard about when she'd come to worship; loved through the patience and kindness of Cheryl and the girls and those who cared for her at the schools. She realized that by being loved she in turn could be herself and get up and live.

Cracked mud and starry nights!

Sounds a lot like how our own lives can be at times. In hard times; times of recession and uncertainty; of sickness and tragedy; when we're craving to be loved and recognized for who we are; times when we think no one cares. It's as if we are staring a dry and thirsty cracked mud pan in the face, where there's no life and no hope.

But it's when we stop and look up, that we get a different perspective. Like Caroline, the stars are a reminder that there's a light and a love that is always shining for us. Each star reminds us that no matter what the circumstances, we are special, we are important, we are loved, there is purpose in life and living, and God who created this earth and us has a special place that only we can fill in his great master plan.

You see it's when we come to realize that we have support and we are loved, that we can face the current challenges of life and even face new ones. It's when we know that we can make mistakes and there is forgiveness, that we can get up and have another go. It's when we come to terms with the fact there is no condemnation, that we can get on with being who we are – being ourselves without any pretence or the pressure of having to prove ourselves to others

Carolyn went home a transformed young woman. She went home to be herself. Consequently her relationship with her family has become much more positive. She has purpose in her life. By taking up the challenge of pursuing her love of music, she has become a successful recording artist in Germany.

Cracked mud and starry nights!

It reminds me that when things got tough in Jesus life, he didn't dwell on the cracked mud. Rather he went out into the starry night and looked up to his Father for love and strength to carry on. And he tells us that no matter how dry and cracked our lives might seem he's there for us with love and life always.

Starry nights beat cracked mud anytime.