



Alive with Love

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This booklet has many different personal stories to encourage us to know that God wants to love (help) us in our everyday lives. As with our friends and family God likes us telling him how much we appreciate his care (love) for us. It's good to talk!

Dr Richard Massey, former Principal of Birmingham Christian college.

In his latest book 'Alive in love' Brian enforces the power of personal testimony with the power of God's written word. With minimum dialogue he weaves together the testimonies and the place of God's word in the lives of people who have come alive through the love of God.

Rev Peter Norris Retired Baptist Minister.

The power of testimony is often underrated by Christians. Brian has infused his latest work with many, powerful testimonies all witnessing to a common theme ... the wonder of God's love. Read and be challenged to engage with the God of Love.

Bruce Ackers, Elder at Coton Green Church.

This booklet contains some powerful testimonies which portray clearly how God can answer prayer and change lives.

L Thompson, Lighthouse co-ordinator.

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Preface

Testimonies always excite me. Looking around the church at a gathering I often wonder what story is behind each face.

One thing I would like to say to those who feel, "I've not got much of a testimony". It's not what we have done but what the Lord has done for us. The Lord has done remarkable things in our lives and as we tell others about them we overcome the enemy whether it is something small or major, do not despise small beginnings.

*Rev 12:10-11 "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ **have come**, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of **the word of their testimony**, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.*

As you read through these testimonies, I pray that you will allow the Spirit of God to come ALIVE within your own heart and that you may personally experience His power and amazing LOVE.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to all who have shared their testimonies, without them there would be no book! Also I would like to thank Lindsey Thompson for her excellent proof-reading skills and my wife, Gill, for her wise and Godly input, and support.

Introduction (Scripture NASB)

He shyly looked into the blue eyes of the one who had just admitted she loved him. He lowered his gaze and said nervously, "I think I love you." She looked at him disappointed and replied, in shocked frustration, "You THINK you love me?"

She looked at him again and thought of a scripture in *Song of Solomon 1:2* *May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine.* Fear swelled up within him as all the doubts and insecurities flooded his mind, powerful prophetic words, etched in his brain from childhood, "You're a failure; you'll never achieve anything." Memories of repeated past "failures" and disappointments burned inside him, but he raised his head and looked again into those blue eyes freely pouring out love. This was a power far greater than the prophetic words of doom. Her look of love opened the flood gates and the strength of that love rose up inside him and totally quenched the fires of fear and failure.

He spoke now with a strong, passionate, confident voice and boldly declared, "Oh, I'm sorry, please forgive me, I don't THINK, I KNOW I love you, totally with all my heart!" At last! He had said it! A strange mix of power, love and joy rushed through him. He experienced a freedom like never before. She looked into his eyes and knew her prayers had been answered. Love had finally conquered his fears.

This was the moment they would both remember for years to come. "You know I love you too," she said, "and have waited, longing for this very time since we first met. I knew then how much I loved you. Now, at last we can share that love." They held each other tightly, their love flowing between them, enveloping – melting - morphing them into an embrace of oneness.

Perfect love, the deep and powerful love that comes from God, casts out all fear. ¹ *John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. God is not looking at us with fearful, downcast eyes saying, "I think I love you." He has no doubts. Like the woman in love, He looks into our eyes with total openness and says, "I love you completely with all my heart. I humbled myself, came down to earth, suffered torture and died to pay for your sin so that now when I look on you*

I know... *You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. (Song of Solomon 4:7)*... You are my bride; let me show you my love. The more you realise how much I love you, the more you will be filled with love for me and others. I AM love. Come to me and soak up my love like a dry sponge welcomes the water it rests in.

So many times a couple will suffer heartache unnecessarily. They both think the other does not love them. Mainly, this is because they do not open up their hearts to each other and discuss issues. Then a “spirit of misunderstanding” takes advantage of the situation. God also suffers heartache when we don’t communicate with Him or respond to His love.

This is a word the Lord dropped into my heart which, with great embarrassment, I shared at a meeting, “My people do not know (recognise) my Spirit. They are not intimate with my Spirit. They have replaced Old Testament laws for laws they have created from the New Testament rather than trusting in the promptings of my Spirit. Some of my people are like a pair of newly weds who are intimate on the first night then live on in the memory of that union. I want to have an ongoing intimate relationship with my people.”

We can doctrinally recognise the Trinity and the truth that God loves us, even have an experience of the Holy Spirit, and yet still not continue in that intimacy. Rather like the couple just mentioned who marry and are intimate on their first night only, then for the rest of their lives live on the memory of that one night. If we want to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit we must spend time in His presence, and allow Him to be intimate with us. The cry from our heart should be, “Holy Spirit, fill me with your presence”.

Song of Solomon is a story of passion and love. Many think: why on earth is that in the Bible? Well, much of the historical Bible accounts are recorded as examples to us and I believe as Paul said to Timothy, *2 Tim 3:16 –17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

God IS spirit and God is love. In this study, I want to focus on how we can experience and enter into the reality of that love, how we can overcome the fears that imprison us. It is not enough to know about love. We must enter into a deeper relationship with the God who IS love.

I have included both scripture examples and testimonies from people who have experienced that love. Many of these experiences have been life changing and of great benefit to the individual and their families. They have come to know that, *God has not given us a **spirit** of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 2 Tim 1:7 (KJV for discipline says “of a sound mind”. ESV says “and self-control”).*

I want to emphasize the literality of that scripture. We are dealing with spiritual entities here. Timidity IS a spirit, (seen in the young man at the beginning of this section), as is power, love and self-control. Behind most attitudes we experience there is usually some spiritual entity, good or bad. Later we will look more closely at Paul's teaching in Ephesians chapter 6 where we are instructed to put on the full armour of God: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Christ came to set the captives free. Mark's Gospel rapidly moves through the three items on Jesus' agenda: this agenda should be the agenda of every Christian.

1. Declaring that the Kingdom (Authority) of God is near.
2. Healing the sick.
3. Casting out unclean spirits.

For those who are ready to pick up the baton, He will give the gifts and authority needed to set captives totally free - free in the spirit, the soul and the body.

Chapter 1 Just use my love

*1 Chronicles 4:10 Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!" **And God granted him what he requested.***

God is more than willing to reach out and intervene in our lives IF WE ASK HIM. This little verse in the Bible shows how an unknown person cries out to the Lord and He answers. God knows us all intimately, there's no "So who are you again, what's your name? Oh yes, Jabez, I'll get back to you on that." God gives us faith, and then if we use it in asking, with belief (which we have because He has given us the faith to believe), He is more than delighted to answer.

The testimony below is from a young woman who reached a stage where she desperately needed to experience real love; only when she cried out to God did she find it.

When I received the news that I was pregnant again, I wasn't best thrilled. In fact the news couldn't have come at a worse time. Whilst having my hands quite full with 2 older bundles of joy, the relationship with my partner was far from healthy. However that was the truth of the matter so I needed to get on with it.

The pregnancy itself was running normally, except that the baby was a little on the small side. Not that you would suspect this from the outside, I felt huge!

When I was 5 months pregnant my partner left for a while to give us both breathing space. It was a relief for me and just what I needed. I enjoyed having some time to myself and life seemed to gain the peace it was lacking before.

It wasn't many weeks later and we decided that we'd carry on and try and work things out. Life seemed to carry on with its usual ups and downs. My due date came and went. I was planning a home birth, the less disruption the better, I thought. That was all to change when after a midwife's visit it was thought best to go to hospital. Six hours later, my beautiful little girl arrived. Not quite recovered from the birth, I had to be taken to theatre for a tiny operation, after which I had an asthma attack.

Not the best 24 hours but now it was all over and I could concentrate on my new little bundle. I found the first few days in hospital really difficult bonding with her. In an unfamiliar place, with so much noise and disruption, and I felt so alone and isolated. All I wanted to do was go home.

When I arrived home the house seemed too clinically clean, with everything in its place, Thank you Lord for Mothers-in-law. The house seemed too quiet. I placed the car seat in the middle of the room and then walked out and left her there. I knew what I was feeling wasn't normal. How could I explain that I didn't love my new baby with her cute button nose and rosy cheeks, and a mop of dark hair. But the sad truth was, I didn't feel the love that I knew I should.

I thought as time went on the feelings would change and things would improve and return to normal.

My feelings did change; I no longer blamed my baby girl for how I was feeling, but still my heart felt numb.

As the days and weeks passed, my little girl grew bigger and stronger. Each new day held the challenge to quietly do what was expected of me, the feeding, changing, bathing.

Each day I would look longingly into my daughter's big blue eyes and search for the answer to why I felt this way. Every day I kept my feelings locked away and no one suspected how I was feeling, but this lie was draining all the energy out of me.

The health visitor suspected that things were not going as smoothly as I said. She gently asked me how I was feeling and immediately I broke down; once the tears started to fall there was no stopping them.

It was a huge relief to be found out. The health visitor reassured me this sometimes happened. Nothing to worry about and help was now on the way. I just wanted to run away and hide from it all, and everybody.

There were various times throughout the seven months I prayed and questioned God, although there never seemed to be any response. People would tell me God was with me, I was never alone. I hadn't been a Christian very long at that time, just a few years. Although I can remember having faith, I simply believed and knew that God was real.

I was getting frustrated and anxious about how I was feeling; I was having panic attacks which were overwhelming. Feeling scared and helpless, I cried out to God with the little faith I felt I had left. I asked God to help me.

I didn't feel any different except I heard in my mind, within my inner self these words, "Don't worry, just use my love".

Without fully understanding what that meant, I knew that God or the Holy Spirit had just spoken those words to me and I remember thinking, I have to trust God.

Nothing changed immediately, until later that same day, just as I was giving my baby her last bottle. I placed her on the bed for a moment, then looking back I caught her gaze, and just at that moment I looked at her but it was different. Tears welled up in my eyes, feelings overwhelmed me; it felt as if my heart was going to burst out of my chest. I held her close to me, and remembered the words from earlier in the day. "Don't worry, just use my love".

I had no explanation to what had just happened except that this was God's love flowing through me. It felt crazy, but I knew it was true. From that moment on the relationship between my beautiful little girl and me had changed, I felt the love that I had longed to feel for so long come flooding in. All I could do was sit and hold her, until she was finally asleep. I look back to that time in my life, and I am still in awe at what God can do when we let Him in. With the tiniest amount of faith He can achieve so much.

By A. Grace.

A miraculous change; all it took was a simple statement from God. In Genesis He says "Let there be light" and there was. Here, all He says is, "Just use my love". We often try in our own strength to do the right thing but can't. All we need to do is surrender and allow God's resources to flow through us.

We are going to continue looking at different situations where God's amazing love is poured out by His amazing grace, showing where and how we can be **alive with love!**

Chapter 2

Time stood still

God's love is often shown in the most amazing and yet practical ways. Reading the history of Israel in the Bible can be startling. Some of the events seem harsh and include nothing less than ethnic cleansing, and yet for those who are putting their trust in God, there is a strong thread of God's all-compassionate and forgiving love flowing through the harshest of situations. There are a couple of stories I would like us to look at, the first in 2 Kings.

20:1-11 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'" Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. "I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'"" Then Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

Now Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?" Isaiah said, "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps or go back ten steps?" So Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to decline ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backward ten steps." Isaiah the prophet cried to the LORD, and He brought the shadow on the stairway back ten steps by which it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

Not only was the king sick and dying but he was trying to rule and lead Israel which was being oppressed by a much bigger, more powerful nation. The king was in a lose-lose situation. The Lord in His compassion told Isaiah to tell the king He would heal him, extend his life and deliver him from oppression. The doubtful king asked for a sign and God made the shadow on the sundial go backwards, put the clock back! You're talking mega miracle, the sort of impossible miracle that would confirm to Hezekiah that not only was he going to get better, but live in freedom from oppression - for another 15 years.

The love of God was not just shown to Hezekiah because of his cry for help, but because God loved him and made promises to Hezekiah's ancestor David. God's love is not just towards us but to our descendants: *Ps 105:8 He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations.*

The second story is from the book of Joshua. *10:1-15 Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (just as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were within their land, that he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty.*

Therefore Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent word to Hoham king of Hebron and to Piram king of Jarmuth and to Japhia king of Lachish and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, and let us attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the sons of Israel." So the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they with all their armies, and camped by Gibeon and fought against it.

Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, "Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us." So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the

valiant warriors. The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal.

And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.

Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

"O sun, stand still at Gibeon,
And O moon in the valley of Aijalon."
So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies.
Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun

stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. There was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp to Gilgal.

Two stories in scripture where God allowed time to stand still because of His love for those involved. There are beautiful parallels in the second story. The people of Gibeon had a severe problem; they were going to be annihilated, so they cried out to Joshua. The Hebrew word Joshua means 'saviour'. It is the same word as the Greek version ... Jesus.

The people of Gibeon cried out to their Jesus who heard and came to their help. God responded to Joshua, a man, and caused the Sun and Moon to stand still.

When Jesus went to the cross to defeat the powers of darkness working in humanity He cried out to the Father for humanity, "Forgive them they don't know what they are doing." And God the Father answered Jesus' request.

Here is another story from a friend of mine where God demonstrated His love for him by "interrupting" his timeline.

For many years I had lived under the fear of committing the unforgivable sin, the sin that Jesus said could not be forgiven, the sin against the Holy Spirit. The problem was it had no real parameters. You could not define it, you couldn't say if you deliberately stuck your tongue out three times and spat on someone that that was it. So how could you know if you had committed it or not?

One day when on holiday with the family I said to my wife, "I'm going to find a Christian bookshop and get something to read for when we are on the beach." Knowing that I might be gone for hours she cautioned me not to be too long so I decided that I would not stay in the shop beyond one thirty.

Frankly the shop was a disappointment; there were no books about the moving of the Spirit in this generation. There were none of the books I loved reading, everything seemed rather dry to me and I told the assistant so. He laughed but then he asked how I was. "OK", I said, lying through my teeth. "Really?" he said seeing beneath my facade. "Well," said I, "for years I've been plagued with the fear that I might have sinned against the Holy Spirit and can't be forgiven."

That did it, he fired up and brought book after book and quoted scripture after scripture to prove to me that God loved me, Christ died for me, He had paid for my sin, I was chosen, I was redeemed, Christ was praying for me, I was saved! Although it was not anything I hadn't

heard before, the strange thing was deep down in my heart the scriptures were beginning to sink in, but I kept looking at my watch: it was getting closer to one thirty.

Then he showed me more scriptures, more books. I looked at my watch, it was close to one thirty but he never stopped and although everything he said was good and sinking in I was conscious that it was slowly getting closer to one thirty.

Eventually I left and as I walked out of the door my watch was reading one thirty. Feeling good I returned to the family only to discover it was twenty past two and my watch had stopped. Maybe the battery had died. I reset the watch and thought I'd give it another chance. It went for two more years without stopping before it needed a new battery! How on earth had that happened?

Although, when I returned, I had the wrath of my upset wife, I did have an inner peace and deep-felt belief that it was God who had stopped my watch. He wanted me to hear the message through to the end. He wanted this to sink in once and for always. I have not sinned against the Holy Spirit; I have peace and assurance that as I submit to Christ He will keep me from committing the unforgivable sin. God made my time stand still so He could show His love for me. I only wish my wife could have been in the same time frame!

By B. Grace.

Time waits for no man; but for God, even time must wait ...if He commands it!

Chapter 3

Love, the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle.

A little girl was drawing a picture; the teacher asked what her picture was about. "It's a picture of God's face" said the girl. The teacher responded, "don't be silly, no one knows what God looks like". "They will when I've finished this!" she replied. So what does God look like? Philip asks Jesus the same question, *John 14: 8-9 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

"That is not very helpful," you say, "because I don't know what Jesus looks like?" Well if we allow Jesus into our lives and allow His Spirit to dwell in us He will start to do things through us. To the person on the receiving end Jesus will look like us! I have seen a picture of the face of Jesus, and then when I zoomed in closer, the face was actually made up of a collection of hundreds of different people's faces like postage stamps.

Sorry, we can't give an accurate picture showing whether He had blue eyes or brown, fair skin or dark, a beard or not. We don't know whether He was short, tall, plump or thin. However, if we move away from His physical appearance and focus on His character John gives us a significant clue in his first letter.

1 John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Ah, so God **IS** love! If you have any love in you it is not just from God **but is God in you**. How do we define or recognise it? Well, most Church weddings include the reading from *1 Corinthians Chapter 13:1-13 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging*

cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is patient,

love is kind and is not jealous;

love does not brag

and is not arrogant,

does not act unbecomingly;

it does not seek its own,

is not provoked,

does not take into account a wrong suffered,

does not rejoice in unrighteousness,

but rejoices with the truth;

bears all things,

believes all things,

hopes all things,

endures all things.

Love never fails;

but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The single lines in bold type are really worth thinking about one by one. Try going back and re-reading them, and then hold each line against yourself: does it match completely, mostly, slightly, faintly, not at all? It's a good indicator of where you are at. Most of us would recognise a real lack in ourselves but please don't try and act better and show more love and think you can get there in your own strength. Just admit before God your lack and ask Him to pour His love into you, Like in the first testimony "Don't worry, just use my love". Ask Him to pour Himself into you as well, because without Him you're on sinking sand. But with Him and His love you become one of those little faces in the big picture of Jesus' face, or the little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle in the next story.

At the age of 7, I was sexually assaulted whilst out playing. I wasn't physically hurt or particularly scared (I didn't understand), but the experience, and the things said at the time, effected me and had a long term affect on my ability to relate to people.

The police told me to forget about it. It was too traumatic to forget, but I didn't feel I was allowed to talk about it. I grew up highly self-reliant, bookish and unable to express my feelings. I had a few friends - but no one I could confide in. I thought my parents must love me - but never felt it. I contemplated suicide over many years, but didn't want to hurt them. I vowed I would never marry - it was safer than being rejected. I

had a few boyfriends in my twenties, but I could be cruel and nothing ever lasted.

When I was 31 I met "Joe". It was love at first sight and I was ecstatic. "Joe" and I both loved sailing and spent long periods on his yacht. However, I worked as a physiology lecturer in Scotland, and he had a similar job in London. After a year of being together, and much thought, I resigned, moved in with "Joe" and obtained a temporary research post in his laboratory.

During this time, my mum was diagnosed with cancer. When she refused further treatment, "Joe" took control; he looked after dad and I so we could spend more time looking after mum at home. A few days after mum died, "Joe's" ex-girlfriend rang – she had left her husband and wanted "Joe" back. I was stunned.

After an agonising month of indecision, "Joe" asked me to leave. I moved back to my flat in Scotland. I had lost everything and there was no-one I could turn to. However, just before mum died, she spoke of Jesus – He was waiting for her and she couldn't wait to be with Him. I didn't understand. I had been forced to go to church as a child, but left as a teenager convinced it was irrelevant. However, suddenly, I felt the only way I would survive was if I could understand why mum loved Jesus. So, in desperation, I said to God, "If you exist I want a job as a Physiologist, working with someone who will show me what it is to be a Christian – and I want to be living in a Christian home". I wish!

Amazingly, two years later, this "prayer" was answered in the course of a single week! By this time I had a job in Cardiff, but it was coming to an end. I was hiding the hurt by hard work. I started sleeping around – so what if they were married – "Joe" hadn't cared. On the day things

changed, I stood up in the club and jokingly asked if anyone knew someone who needed a physiologist.

Unbelievably, someone said "Yes" and gave me a phone number for a man called "Alex". "Alex" offered me the job, but warned me he liked to talk about his faith – if I wasn't comfortable with this, I shouldn't accept. I was curious. I told "Alex" everything. He just accepted it (wow) and became my teacher. (At the same time, an advert appeared in the newsagents for a room to let offering cheap accommodation; I moved in and discovered they were a lovely Christian couple.)

"Alex" was special. Amongst other things he encouraged me to apply for and take a three month sabbatical in Vancouver, Canada, teaching and undertaking research. He had many Christian friends in the area, and they took turns in providing me with food and a room, and wouldn't take a penny in return. It was unbelievable they would do this for a stranger. "Alex" also introduced me to his church; they were so kind. They had been praying for me. I would come home from work and find someone had cut the grass, or they would leave flowers.

I began to feel uneasy. Why were these people being so nice? What did they want from me? The turning point came one autumn day. I was walking up the street, kicking leaves, deep in thought and quite distressed. A picture came into my mind; it was the face of Jesus but there were pieces missing, like a jigsaw. As I remembered the kindnesses, the missing pieces flew forwards past my ears and slotted into place. I then understood that the kindnesses were acts of love – they were showing me what Jesus was like. From then on I was able to relax and accept their love.

As time went on I asked Jesus into my life and became a Christian. At first I fought against it with arguments about evolution and other

concerns, but God reassured me that all would become clear in time. The moment I accepted Jesus, I had this amazing sense of peace and finally I understood what mum believed.

A year later I was baptised on a Welsh hillside. It was a lovely day and I was so proud that my dad came. However, the pain of being in a church that was soaked in love, and still missing "Joe", was becoming intolerable. Things came to a head on a Friday when I couldn't stop crying; the leader came round and invited me to a church conference in London the following day. I went "just for a day out". When I got there, there were 10,000 Christians all worshipping God.

They were unbelievably excited - I thought they were hysterical. However, as I praised God, a voice said "Put your hands in the air and you will be released". I was embarrassed, but so wanted to be free, I put my hands in the air, making sure no one from my church was watching. I don't remember much more, except that someone came and prayed with me. She laid her hand over my heart and all the pain and anger....just went.

Since becoming a Christian, I've had the confidence to talk about my childhood and the other events in my life, and to undertake personal development/pastoral care training through the Bridge Foundation. I've helped in a homeless shelter and the drop-in listening centre, and recently become a Street Pastor, being available to help the vulnerable on the streets at night. I could never repay all the special people who have helped me; however, I've learnt that the most important thing I can do for myself and others is to "pass the love on".

Yes, "pass the love on". Give it away. When the missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle flew into place she realised that the acts of love were actually Jesus working through other Christians. She saw Him more clearly, not so much in a

visual concept but in His character and person. Just like He said to Philip, *“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* In the same way He is saying to you, “If you have seen My acts through My disciples you have seen Me, they are in Me and I am in them. Can you not see my love shining through them towards you?”

We need to see Jesus in others and not be afraid. When we are frightened, for most of us, we want a real physical person to comfort us. That’s when Jesus uses us to help others, or others to help us. This doesn’t make Jesus less real but even more real!

Here is a simple but lovely little story to illustrate the point. A mummy was putting her daughter to bed and all the lights went out. Mummy says, “Darling don’t be afraid, Jesus is close by, He will protect you. Mummy is just going down stairs for a candle, I’ll be back in a minute.” The little girl replies, “Mummy, please stay with me and send Jesus for the candle.” The wonderful thing is that Jesus can be in the heart of the frightened child and in the Mummy. His love extends to all of us; we just need to recognise it - as the person in the above testimony eventually did.

Chapter 4 Prisoners set free

This is the testimony of a prisoner who I never met but for a while we were in contact by post. He read two of my booklets which ministered to him and he shared his testimony with me which I will try to relate. For the sake of privacy we will call him Bill.

Bill was at peace; at last he had decided to end it all by taking his own life. He sat in the segregation unit (isolation block) waiting for the change of shift at 9pm.

Bill's plan was that the changeover would be a distraction. He thought the officers would be too focussed on handing over information to notice what he was going to do. Bill was serving a life sentence for murder, an act he has no recollection of because, as an alcoholic, he committed the act during a blackout. He believed death would release him from the constant remorse he was experiencing.

Looking on the shelf in the cell he saw a Gideon New Testament & Psalms. Then he heard a distinct voice say, "Read that book". His mind responded, "Why? What good will it do?" "Just read it," said the voice. Bill argued but the voice persisted and eventually he thought, well it would pass the time.

Starting at Matthew chapter one he read the genealogies leading up to Christ and found it really boring until he reached Matt 1:16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. Like a flash of light somehow Bill realised that Jesus really existed, He was a real person and Bill shouted out, "Wow, He is real." From then on he could not stop reading.

At the beatitudes the tears were flowing, but still no hope. He still believed God could not accept him because of what he had done. He tried to put the book down, but couldn't. He felt a compulsion to keep reading. Then at Luke's Gospel chapter 15:11-32 in the story of the prodigal son, Bill saw how the Father loved and longed to be reunited with His wayward son. The tears started again but this time they were tears of joy. There was hope; he could find forgiveness; he no longer wanted to die; he wanted to live. He spent the rest of the evening to the early hours of the morning reading the Bible.

He lay in bed resting his eyes, but excited, he started to pray. It was real! Jesus was real. He couldn't see Him but knew He was there and that he heard his prayer.

A few days later he returned to one of the wings and asked to see the chaplain. Bill told him what happened so the chaplain asked him if he wanted to come to chapel on Sunday. On Sunday he went to the front by the altar and made a public commitment to Christ. At least three years later Bill was still rejoicing in his salvation and experiencing spiritual gifts. Sadly I have lost track of his whereabouts but I am convinced someone with such a dramatic testimony is still continuing in faith, alive with love!

His testimony was published by the Gideons who were also rejoicing over a life changed and saved by God through the ministry of their workers distributing Bibles in prisons and other places like schools and hotels, just to mention a few.

God's Word is amazing when the Holy Spirit shines a light on it. Who would have thought an account of the genealogies would be instrumental in bringing someone to Christ?

This next testimony is of another prisoner who went "off the rails" as a young teenager. Sadly there are an increasing number of lads who have gone down a

similar road and ended up in prison. That transition period between childhood and adulthood, if not given love, discipline and correct directional guidance, sees that lovely little boy change into an angry, frustrated young man. Here is his story in his own words.

My Testimony

Dear Friends

When I was younger I defied everyone; parents, grandparents and even the Lord. Just for the record everyone who knows me knows that I had a very hard up-bringing. I was homeless from the age of fourteen living under a canal bridge not far from the town centre. I was in this predicament for eighteen months altogether before I came to prison

It was while I was on the streets that I started to commit crime to fund food, drink and even drugs. My parents said when they saw me that I had taken the path of the Devil which made me unhappy. Then things started to go downhill. I committed two serious offences in one night; two stabbings, which I am now in prison for. I committed these offences when I was fifteen, and have been in prison ever since. I am now twenty years old. Sometimes I am asked if I could, would I go back and change everything. The answer to this is NO, and I will try to explain. If I did I wouldn't be where I am today.

The day that I landed in the system I arrived at HMYOI and I thought that it wasn't so bad. How wrong was !! When I got to the wing from reception I thought, "what have I done with my life?" and when they locked the door to my cell I felt like crying. A week into my sentence I set three pads on fire and got "blocked off" for a month.

It was while down on the block that I picked up a Bible. It was the first Bible I had read in over six years. I read the first four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and while I was reading them I felt something

that I had never felt before, I felt remorse for the crimes I had committed, and for all the people I had hurt including family and friends.

It was after this experience that I started to turn my life around. After I did my time down on the block I went back to the wing a changed person. I was politer than when I first came on the wing and within a month I had my enhanced rating and a paid job.

I'll tell you why this happened. It was because God was working in my life and helping me to turn around from the way I was to the way the Lord wanted me. I started to go to chapel every week and started to learn what the Lord was about and what He could do. I was in this place from December 2007 up to February 2012 when I got transferred to another HMYOI.

I know that it's hard when you get shipped out from a prison you are used to, where you know people and all of a sudden you find yourself miles from home in a place where you don't know anyone.

I was surprised the day I came onto the wing I am still on today. I got chatting to some lads who were of the same faith as me, they told me to get my name down for chapel and we've been friends ever since. I started to go to chapel again and still do and it was a couple of months later that I decided that I wanted to take the next step into becoming a follower of the Lord.

I decided I wanted to get baptised and let the Lord take complete control of my life. I was one of 18 people to get baptised on the same day and it was one of the best decisions of my life.

I was nervous at the start of the day, but at the end I felt that my life had opened up to a load of new possibilities and I knew this was what the Lord wanted me to do with my life. I was a born again Christian.

After I got baptised I said the following prayer: - "Jesus, I am truly sorry for my sins. I am a sinner, a hopeless sinner. A hopeless sinner bound to sin on Earth. Jesus at this time, I ask you to come into my life, to save me from the death of sin. I accept you as my saviour and as the Lord of my life. I ask you to give me the wisdom and power that I may grow strong in your love and be righteous in the ways and love of our Father. Jesus, I know you have spared my life from eternal death and I thank you for this gift of life everlasting. Thank you for becoming Lord of my life! Amen!"

He continues in his testimony to encourage, no, beseech his readers to turn to the Lord, read the Bible, to attend chapel and let Jesus be Lord of their lives. Finally he quotes *Psalm 18:6 & 16 in my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.....He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out of many waters.17 He delivered me from my strong enemy, And from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.*

The psalm was written by King David who was in a hopeless situation with thousands of enemies surrounding his small group, but he called out to God who saved him. Step by step God delivered him from situations that were beyond David's capability and power.

Little by little David's character developed until he was ready to be king. His foundation starting point was his relationship with God. As a boy out on the hills looking after sheep this young man talked to God, and wrote poems which he put to music. We call them psalms. When you read the psalms you begin to hear another voice as well as David's; the voice of God Himself showering down His love on those who seek Him.

It took years for David's character to fully develop. Likewise with us all, step by step He leads us and teaches us. In a sense we are always growing and learning, no matter how young or old we are. The main thing is, are we facing the right direction?

This young man is now facing the right direction. He may well stumble a little now and then but God is helping him put his life back together, and if he continues to hold the Lord in his heart then the Lord will honour him and take him deeper into Himself. Already he is reunited with his family. That is the love of God at work. *Psalm 68:6 God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, only the rebellious dwell in a parched land. (KJV God setteth the solitary in families.)*

He is recognising that he can experience thoughts of kindness and consideration for others and that those thoughts are prompted by the Holy Spirit. So when he has unkind and rebellious thoughts, they are not from the Holy Spirit and he needs to reject them, or life becomes like dwelling in a parched land.

The thoughts followed by actions that got him into prison were prompted by an unholy spirit to which he submitted. We can all receive evil thoughts, even Jesus was tempted, but we can learn from Jesus to counteract these thoughts with words from scripture. If we don't know scripture and we are plagued with thoughts that we know are not right we can say "Jesus is Lord" repeatedly. The apostle Paul said in his letter *1 Cor 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord", except by the Holy Spirit.*

If we repeatedly say "*Jesus is Lord*", a spirit that is not of the Holy Spirit will diminish in strength. Or if we simply pray to Jesus for help He will answer our cry. Whether we are self-harming, angry or depressed, just declare "*Jesus is Lord*", and ask Him to help you. He loves you, He wants you to be alive with love!

Chapter 5

God in Billy Graham and a sleeping teenager

Probably no one has stood in front of more people and preached the message of salvation than Billy Graham. He has reached such a wide range of people with the gospel, from the middle class church goer to the rough and ready man in the back street. Whatever our background, to quote *Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

What does that mean, particularly to fall short of the glory of God? Well we just don't match up to God's power and majesty; we are in no way perfect as He is perfect. All of us need to receive His love and forgiveness. Nothing we do in the form of ritual alone can reach our hearts like the reality of a relationship with Jesus.

With the Lord it's not "Ritual, Ritual, Ritual" as in us "doing", reading the Word and prayers, etc., good and necessary as they are. It's all about "Relationship, Relationship, Relationship". Once the relationship is there then some form of framework can be an aid to our relationship.

Here is the testimony of a clean living church goer who came under the sound of the gospel at a Billy Graham rally. In her own words she admits the ritual she had performed year in year out had never brought her peace until she finally entered into a relationship with Jesus.

I had been a churchgoer most of my life when I went to a Billy Graham rally in 1984. It was then that I realized there was an important step I had never taken, so I gave my life to Jesus, accepting Him as my Lord and Saviour.

On the following Saturday, I went into the parish church that I attended every Sunday and sat there for a while. Then I opened a prayer book and started to read through the Communion service –

service I had been to many, many times over the years. As I was reading, the tears started to flow because in every line the Lord seemed to be saying: "I love you". The God whom I had always seen as a God who was going to punish me if I did not do the right thing, was telling me- me personally that He loved me! For years in church services, I had recited the General Confession, longing for forgiveness yet never feeling forgiven. Now, at last, I felt forgiven and I knew without a doubt that God loved me.

Many times since, God has shown His love for me in different situations, but that first encounter with Jesus will always stay with me. No matter what I have been through, or will go through in my Christian life, one thing remains a certainty in my heart - the wonderful knowledge that God loves me.

Gina Edwards

God was real now to Gina. Words from the Communion Service that for years she had ritualistically repeated NOW were anointed by the Holy Spirit. NOW it was real. NOW it was Jesus in her heart speaking the words. The "Word became flesh". When we have a relationship with the Lord it is not long before He starts to act through us; He puts something in our hearts and we get involved. There are a number of activities within the church that Gina has taken 'responsibility for'. This is how the Lord builds His kingdom, with those who walk with Him.

Below is the testimony of Ruth, a young woman who loved the Lord and wanted to go deeper in her involvement and commitment to Him. There is a fine line between willing service and slavery. Only true love can separate the two and the Lord told her to "receive my love". Here is her story:

Receive my love

In the summer I went to Harvest School (Iris Ministries in Pemba, Mozambique) for 3 months. From the beginning I kept asking God for revelation for my future – mission work, country, finance etc. God's response was, "Just receive my love." I have always been more of a doer and find it difficult to sit and receive. Thinking of Mary and Martha in the Bible, I could definitely relate to Martha and here was God asking me to sit at His feet, like Mary, and receive from Him. So I started praying and telling God that I was ready to receive His love.

God wanted me to receive His love as a daughter, not as a slave or orphan. I had been meditating on *Romans 8:14-16* for all (male or female) who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

I was prompted to learn these verses off by heart. To start with, it was my mind engaging with the verses of scripture, but the more I read, learnt and spoke out this scripture the more the truth penetrated into my heart: I am a daughter of God. (The prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 quoted by Peter tells of a time when God will pour out His Spirit on ALL people, men and women alike.)

I celebrated my 30th birthday during my time at Harvest School. I had planned in my head how wonderful it would be to be in class in the morning with lots of worship and ministry and then the afternoon free to go to the beach and out for a special dinner.

My plans were completely changed as there was a conference that week and as students we had to attend all sessions as well as doing some chores to help accommodate the 2000 guests. However, I had the most

amazing birthday and I am so thankful that God's plans were so much better than mine!

The day started with sunrise on the beach and I broke my fast with communion. My duty for the afternoon was cleaning latrines, but even this was a blessing as I spent time with inspiring people. After a fried chicken dinner I went to the conference's evening meeting. The praise and worship time in the church was incredible with over 2000 people and lots of dancing, African style.

During the worship I found myself on my knees feeling unworthy to be in God's presence. I was reminded of the scripture I'd been learning in Romans 8 about being a child of God. I started to recite the verses and I felt peace and, as a daughter, worthy to be in the presence of God.

Following this, the service leader asked us to take the hand of the person next to us and pray for them to receive God's love. I looked around and all my friends close to me had paired up and were praying for each other. I felt disappointed because no one had prayed for me all day and it was my birthday and even now there was no one to pray for me.

Then I noticed a teenage boy sitting next to me, who was sleeping. I knew I had to pray for him so I put my hand on his shoulder and started to pray for him. I prayed that he would receive God's love, but I was still thinking, "Why is no one praying for me, it's my birthday?"

As I prayed I started crying; God was breaking my heart for that boy. Who was he? He was probably an orphan. God showed me a picture of a lady with a baby at her breast and I prayed that the boy would know God's love in the same way that a baby knows love. I then saw a picture of a man with a small child on his lap, so I prayed the boy would know God's love in the way that the child on the lap knows love.

I was crying as I prayed. AND then I realized that God was showing me HIS LOVE and I received HIS LOVE. It was beautiful. I didn't need anyone to pray for me at all. God flooded me with His Love as I prayed for someone else. Thank you God for your amazing love. I want to remain in your love (John 15:9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in my love.")

Ruth Ackers October 2012 www.joyinstead.wordpress.com

God is amazing, to one of us He speaks through a big name, to another He uses a sleeping teenager orphan. To God there is little difference; He loves you, Billy Graham and the sleeping teenager just the same, completely. Nothing you do can make Him love you more. All He longs for is that you experience His love. The more you do the less fears you will have (perfect love casts out fear) and you will love others more.

There is a story in Numbers where God uses a donkey to speak to Balaam. *Numbers 22:27-31 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No."*

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground.

OK, if God can use Billy Graham, a sleeping teenager and a donkey, how about a dog? In the next testimony Lesley shares a recent incident where the Lord used Max, her much loved dog to illustrate something to her. No, Max didn't start talking but he made his point.

Lesley

I could write pages and pages of incidents where God has helped me through the many difficult times in my life and where He has directed me. I could give you many insights into times when I've called out to God and he has sent someone along to help me or comfort me.

In a song called Salvation Day based on John 3:16 it says, 'God so loved this world that He gave His Son so whoever would put their trust in Him would live forever'. 'I was dead but now I live; all my sin has been forgiven; now with all my heart and soul I sing, thank You for my Salvation Day.'

As a now single woman, whose marriage failed, I find it hard to form relationships with people (especially men) even after 18 years of being on my own. I either push my relationships with others to destruction point or do not make a relationship at all! You could call them 'hot or cold' or 'all or nothing' relationships.

So this is what I try to do to my Lord as I try to push Him away when I'm down and hurting. BUT He doesn't leave me, He stays close by and waits till I return to His side; then He forgives me and loves me unconditionally. It may take me an hour, a day, a week or even longer to say "I'm back Lord" and He just welcomes me back into His arms like I have never been away.

In Luke 15:11-32 Jesus tells the story of a wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him. My testimony is on-going and it will never be completed until my time on this earth has finished and I meet with my Lord on that final judgment day when I will live with Him and spend eternity with Him.

As I live on my own (although my 30 year old daughter still lives with me), it is in the quiet of the night that I feel totally alone. I have anxiety/depression and worry about things, so the night is a bad time for me as my mind goes into overdrive and I then go into panic mode.

It is at the point when I feel totally alone that God is the only one I can reach out to. Then He helps me feel secure enough to get me through the dark of the night into the light of the day!

Jesus says in John 8:12 *"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."*

One night lying wide awake in bed with Max, my dog, by my side, I was feeling alone and a bit sorry for myself. God revealed to me that Max is fully reliant on me to feed him, care for him and love him.

In return he shows me affection and he fully trusts me to provide for his every need. As Max lay flat on his back, totally relaxed and in submission to me, I heard the Lord say "Just like Max I want you to be totally relaxed in my presence and put your trust in Me then I will provide all that you need." Then He went on to say "Come to me and be still in my presence and I will give you the rest needed, especially in the still of the night when you feel alone!" Jesus says in the following scripture:- *Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Lesley understands the depth of that scripture. We think of a yoke as a support for carrying heavy loads, say water, for instance. It was also used by Rabbis to illustrate to their disciples that they should take their master's teaching like a yoke and carry it (observe and obey it). Christ criticized the Jews for unnecessarily burdening the people with all their heavy teaching.

In this scripture Christ is telling the people to let go of the heavy loads imposed by the Jews and come and take His teaching onboard. It's not heavy, "*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" God in His love for us does not overburden us, He invites us to come and sit with Him and experience His presence which is overflowing with love. (See my booklet "Come, sit with me".). God is constantly using different ways to communicate His love to us. He wants us to be alive with love!

Chapter 6

I will not leave you as orphans

On the night of the last supper Jesus shared with His friends whom He considered brothers that He was soon to leave them. Who was now going to lead them and give them direction in their lives? They must have felt like orphaned children, because seeing their faces Jesus reassured them, "I will not leave you as orphans". The next testimony is of a man who was left with his brothers and sisters as an orphan. Read how through it all he came to a place where he no longer saw himself as an orphan in spiritual terms. He found what the disciples found, "*another Helper that He may be with you forever*". The scripture below sets the scene.

John 4:16-20 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

I was born in the back-to-back houses of Winson Green in Birmingham in 1950. My family, from that time, lived there for two years, before being moved out to what was then the 'new development' of Shard End, also in Birmingham.

It was here that two brothers were born. The youngest was just a few months old when our father died, after being bed-ridden for some time with rheumatoid arthritis, leaving my mother with three young children.

After coping for a good while as best she could she met a widower who showed an interest in her and in us boys. They eventually married and he moved in with us along with his two daughters.

Another child was born from this marriage, which meant there were six of us children altogether living in a two-bedroomed flat. It soon became apparent that this man had a serious alcohol problem, which was not obvious before he moved in with us.

When under the influence he became very abusive and violent towards my mother and us children. Money was in very short supply because the bulk of what he earned was spent on drink and therefore there were times when we went without food and heating.

Eventually my mother could stand no more and when I was thirteen years old she decided to take her own life, leaving us as orphans. Within hours of her death, my two younger brothers and I were separated from my youngest brother and two step sisters and taken to a children's home, where we lived for a couple of years. Then the three of us were placed in foster care, where I lived until I was sixteen. My disrupted schooling finished at that point and I then decided that I wanted more independence and took up 'live-in' employment as a farm hand.

I began to lose touch with my brothers and started to get caught up in the youth culture of the 1960s. With no thought for the future I gave up my job and the accommodation that went with it and on an impulse decided to go off to a rock concert with some people I'd recently met. On my return the realisation hit me that I had nowhere to go.

Two years of homelessness followed, which meant begging on the streets and sleeping wherever I could (derelict buildings, garage roofs,

shop doorways, etc). During this time I began to become dependent on the drugs of the day.

This aimless and chaotic lifestyle began to take its toll on my health, which resulted in a perforated duodenal ulcer. I was rushed to hospital just hours away from death. After surgery, which involved the removal of part of my stomach, I gradually recovered but life was still going nowhere.

After a while one of my brothers appeared on the scene again, who, since I'd last had contact with him, had become a Christian. He talked to me about Jesus frequently. He also had a friend, who after a road accident, which had affected his mental capacity was a simple soul with simple understanding. Every time I saw him he would say to me, "Jesus loves you", as simple as that. At first I was not overly impressed, but I began to watch my brother to see if he was living the life he was telling me about.

After about 12 months I decided he was, and recognised that what he had was real. I knew that I needed to do something about my drug dependency, but knew also that to stop taking them would inevitably mean the pain of withdrawal.

I clearly remember one evening looking up and saying, "If you are the God my brother says you are, prove it! I will physically stop taking the drugs if you deal with the withdrawal pain." I did and He did! I didn't have any withdrawal symptoms. That was my first personal experience of God's love for me.

It was then that I knew that this Jesus was real and decided to follow him. I was baptised and got involved with the church that my brother belonged to. For several years life was still full of ups and downs, but

gradually my commitment to Jesus began to bring about a sense of order, stability and security that I had not known before.

Eventually I managed to obtain some council accommodation and began to attend a small fellowship nearby, where friendships developed that remain to this day. After deciding to follow Jesus, I had realised that my previous friends were an influence that I needed to be free from.

Having reached my 30s by this time I was beginning to wonder if I was destined to remain single, but the Lord had other ideas! He drew in several other believers to unite with us from a larger church, among whom was the young woman who was to become my wife – yet another wonderful demonstration of God's love for me.

Life was getting better and better. However, because of the traumas of the past, I still had some deep-seated fears and anxieties, which resulted in frequent and severe panic attacks. It got to the point whereby many aspects of my life (work, church life, social occasions etc.) were being affected and disrupted by these debilitating episodes. These continued for about 15 years. I was becoming desperate and often cried out, "How long Lord?" One Sunday evening I felt compelled to go to a meeting taking place in the centre of Birmingham. At the end of the meeting I responded to a call to go out for prayer. I remember calling out, "Son of David, have mercy on me." Then I found myself on the floor, shaking and tingling, with legs like jelly, unable to get to my feet. After what seemed like an age, but was probably between 5 and 10 minutes, I managed to stand up and knew instantly that I'd been set free from the panic attacks. I have been free of them now for over a decade
is there no end to this God's love?

Because of the tremendous love God has shown my wife and I, we have been able to share that love with others over the years. We were foster carers for some time and also cared for my mother in law when she developed dementia in the latter part of her life. These were challenging times, which really stretched us to our limits on occasions, but by God's grace and with His help we made it through.

There are still mountains to climb and valleys to negotiate, particularly with regard to bouts of depression that I experience from time to time. I'm still a work in progress, as we all are, but there is no doubt in my mind that "GOD IS LOVE".

In conclusion, I refer to the words of an old song that I sometimes sing to myself:-

Because He lives I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives, all fear is gone,
Because I know, I know who holds the future,
Life is worth the living just because He lives.

There are so many amazing points in this testimony: the loss of his father was terrible, years of struggle with a drunken step-father, followed by the terrible loss of his mother, finally being in a long-term stable marriage where they fostered other people's children. All the blessings of Isaiah 61 were poured out and experienced because of the promise of Jesus, "I will not leave you as orphans" at the beginning of this chapter.

Isa 61:1-3 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me.....To comfort all who mourn, To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.

Chapter 7

Life out of death

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Because Jesus died we can have abundant life. There seems to be this principle in creation that new life comes out of death. Nothing is lost in God's economy. In the garden dead leaves, grass, plants etc. go into the compost bin and in a couple of years becomes fertile compost to mix in the soil.

The grain falls into the ground and it seems to rot and die, but then we see a little shoot emerging with new life. This grows into a stem with a cluster of seeds on the end, maybe 40, 60 or 100. At the time we only see the loss but with God there is no loss! In the next testimony Jean shares about her loss that led to her own salvation and a normal healthy child.

I was christened and attended Sunday school until the age of fifteen or sixteen. I thought I was a Christian until one day my history teacher (who some years later became my husband) referred to Jesus as a social revolutionary. Accepting this view, and, not knowing much about social revolutionaries, I took this to mean Jesus was a bad man. I rejected him, and from that day on thought of myself as an atheist.

After doing "A levels" I went to teacher training college for four years, got a job as a maths teacher, was married, and 3 years later gave birth to my first child, a boy. I left teaching to look after the baby and help my husband with his second-hand bookselling business which in due course became his full-time job.

Our second child was born 2 and a half years later. Towards the end of the nine month pregnancy an X-ray revealed that the child was

anencephalic. This is an abnormality resulting in the partial to complete absence of the brain, such that the baby is unable to survive for long after being born.

I was told the baby would die shortly after birth. He did, in fact, live for four days after being born. My feelings were those of shock and grief. I found it difficult to speak to those around me. During my time in hospital a voice spoke into my consciousness, saying, "I can help you". I knew this to be the voice of God, and said "yes" to this help. I also opened a hospital Gideon New Testament Bible and caught the word 'death' on one side of the page and 'life' on the opposite page. I knew that God was saying that I would have another baby who would live.

When I came out of hospital I was determined to find God in a way that would mean He would be with me always as I wanted Him to be. I made contact with 2 friends who were Christians and one of these took me to a ladies' meeting at her pastor's home (the meeting was organised by his wife). I attended these meetings regularly and heard people pray, read the Bible and tell how they became Christians. I read the New Testament and when I came to the scripture *Matt 7:1 Do not judge so that you will not be judged*. I knew that was what I was guilty of doing. Before reading those words I had thought of myself as a good person, doing nothing wrong. Having read the New Testament and talking with Christians, I then knew that I did do wrong by God's standard. I needed to be forgiven and believe in Jesus, who died for my wrongdoing.

I considered all the implications of praying and receiving Jesus as my saviour - particularly as my husband was very antagonistic towards any Christian belief and I knew it would cause tension between us. But I knew, too, that this was what I needed and had wanted ever since

the time I had heard God speak to me in the hospital and say that He could help me.

So one Saturday morning in March, about 9 months after the anencephalic baby had died; I understood that through the cross Jesus had died for me to pay for my wrong-doing. I prayed to God and asked Him to forgive me and to send His Spirit into my life. I knew immediately that God had answered my prayer; I felt a burden lift from me and a new love, joy, and peace enter into my being. I knew I had become a Christian and that Jesus had come into my life by His Spirit and that He would always be with me to help and guide me.

After this I went to a 'Come back to God' campaign meeting at Coton Green Church and told the people there that I was a Christian. I began to attend various meetings, all of which I thoroughly enjoyed. Then I joined a local mother and toddler group and tried to tell the mothers there of the love of Jesus and how to become a Christian.

In that same year, shortly after becoming a Christian, I had my third baby boy. I had the amniocentesis test to see if the baby was normal and he was. I knew God had brought forth a life as He had told me. I praised Him all night long for the baby he had given me.

Jean is now rejoicing: two normal healthy boys and a personal relationship with God. What could be better? In my own marriage after the birth of our first child, who was a beautiful bright little girl (now a senior university lecturer), there followed a difficult time. My wife had a miscarriage followed by a troubled pregnancy. One night, with some friends before leaving, we prayed together and 2 of my friends brought similar confirming prophecies: "you are entering a storm and waves will appear to overwhelm you as you pass through the valley of the shadow of death but fear not for I am with you." Wow! What was that all about? I soon found out; a few days later I rushed my wife into hospital. That night she

delivered twins; one was still-born, the other died within 48 hours. Jesus warned His disciples that they would have times of trouble but He would give them peace, *John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*

A year later my wife was pregnant again (see "What! speak through me?" for the full story) and she was concerned because of her history. As it turned out she had no problems and our second girl was born. Something that only occurred to me after I had read Jean's testimony was the significance of what happened after my second child was born. From the age of three she set her heart on becoming a doctor. She is now a paediatrician saving the lives of sick children - so from the twins that "fell into the ground" God produced a paediatrician bringing healing to many sick children. I can think of many tragedies that ultimately lead to the birthing of something wonderful, including Jean's testimony. She now continues...

The following year I heard God again say to me, while I was resting on the sofa, "A shadow will cross your life but I the Lord will be with you". At first I didn't understand what it meant. A few months later I conceived again; an amniocentesis test showed there were problems.

The degree of abnormality was unknown and I was asked to decide whether to have an abortion or go full-term with the pregnancy. I was against the abortion of babies, but, having received God's word that a shadow would cross my life, I knew the baby would die and the abnormality was probably the same as before. I had a termination at four months and suffered depression until I heard the result that the baby would not have lived and was indeed anencephalic, as before. I thanked God that He had helped me through this uncertain and difficult time and for speaking to me, even before I had conceived.

Since this time I have received much prayer through the Church and help from God. I believe with continued prayer and help from the Lord

my husband and sons will also one day know Him, praise the Lord!

I have shared with you my testimony and something of the promises and goodness of God towards me. I pray that, if you are not already a Christian, you might consider whether what you most need and want is the support of the living God, whose Son, Jesus Christ, died that you too might be forgiven and receive the free gift of eternal life.

Jean Chesters

Later, because of her experience with her own terminations, Jean joined a clinic to give counsel and support to young pregnant girls and women, some of whom were considering termination. She also went into secondary schools to give students, both boys and girls, information on pregnancy and abortion with the aim of hopefully reducing the number of unplanned pregnancies. Again, nothing in God's economy is wasted. Out of the terminations that "fell into the ground" in her own life God produced a counsellor to support and advise young girls and women who were making a very difficult choice in their lives." Out of death came life.

Chapter 8

Put on the full armour of God. “Ah but...what if?”

Matthew 22:29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God."

Jesus had just been asked a “what if” hypothetical question. The one about the woman who consecutively married seven brothers as they all died one after the other. Whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

Now remember, this is not a pub quiz; Jesus is talking to men who were “doctorates” in theology. By the time they were in their teens they would have known what we call the Old Testament word for word, off by heart. *"You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God."*

So how do we move from knowing scripture off by heart, which is a good thing, to understanding them and the power of God? It is more than just being sincere. It is possible to be sincerely wrong like Jesus accused these guys of being. Jesus prayed one day saying, *Matt 11:25 "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, for this way was well- pleasing in Your sight."*

It is possible when anyone says something for you to get hold of the wrong end of the stick. Jesus says that the Father has hidden things from the intelligent and revealed them to infants. So it is by the grace of God that we receive anything, which He does not withhold from the humble, but He does withhold from the arrogant who think of themselves as intelligent and superior like the Jews Jesus was criticizing did.

Only the spirit of the person knows what is in the heart and mind of that person. So we need to get into the speaker’s heart and mind. Actually get into the spirit of the speaker.

We have to get past the academic to what the speaker was really thinking when they said what they said. Paul says in Ephesians 6:10:17 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. (Yes, His might, the power of God, as Jesus said) Put on the full armour of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the Devil.*

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the full armour of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

First we have to realise our fight is against spiritual forces. These conflicts take place in the mind, in our thoughts as we struggle to choose what we believe is right. Jesus experienced this struggle in the wilderness. When I travelled through that area I saw these balls of brown stone that looked just like homemade cobs of bread, especially if you were hungry! “If you are the son of God turn these stones into bread.” We know this was the Devil, whether in physical form or in the mind, but never-the-less communicating with Jesus.

The Devil, or his henchmen, do just the same to us. If we know scripture he uses scripture in a perverse way to twist the truth. Jesus answered with the “right” scripture. How do we know which scripture or argument to use?

Having realised our fight is against spiritual forces; *therefore, take up the full armour of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.* It is the armour of God and the power of God that is going to protect us and filter off some of the possibilities of being “mistaken”.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the full armour of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the Devil. No Roman soldier would dream of going to battle without having all his armour in place. It would be utter foolishness, like driving a racing motorbike in flip-flops, shorts and a T-shirt instead of wearing boots, leathers, gloves and a helmet. So what is the full kit in God's armour?

Ephesians 6:14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Some translations refer to the "belt of truth"; this belt holds your kilt or skirt up. This belt would support the breast-plate and the sword. So this belt of truth holds everything together. There could be nothing more embarrassing than standing there naked as an exposed liar because the belt of truth disintegrated, no longer giving support. So, in everything, be truthful; don't, as stated about one politician, be "economical" with the truth, that's like walking on thin ice. Don't just act truthfully, BE truthful.

Next is the *breastplate of righteousness*. Righteousness is more than speaking the truth. It is being right in thoughts and deeds; acting out and living in a truthful way before God. The breastplate protects your heart, among other things. Being righteous does not give the enemy any discrepancies in thought or deed to accuse you of doing wrong. I think of Job, *Job 1:8 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."* The Devil could not get a grip on him because he was righteous. However, much better than your own righteousness, is the righteousness of God. So as well as being righteous, claim the righteousness of Christ for your breastplate. Then whatever the Devil tries to hit you with, you can say "I am not trusting in my own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ." The Devil can't penetrate Christ's righteousness.

Now continue: *having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.* Know the *gospel*, the good news about the peace of God. Peace is “shalom”, which is more than the absence of hostilities; it is the complete wholeness and health of God, and the salvation He offers. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, be ready to share it, then your feet are shod. Notice the link here with feet. If you have some wonderful news in your heart you want to run out and tell everyone. Like the Samaritan woman. She didn't tell everyone by sitting at the well, no “what ifs” or “ah buts”; she left her water pot, went and told the town about Jesus. There are real parallels to deeper meanings with each item of armour used.

Don't forget *in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* Think of medieval times when a lot of houses were timber framed with thatched roofs. An enemy would shoot *flaming arrows* at the house and very quickly the whole thing would be on fire. The Devil will drop a thought from his spirit to your spirit that will enter your mind like a burning arrow. “You're not very good at this Christian thing are you?” Quickly the thought will take hold, all the positives, and the self-made protective walls and roof will be burnt up and your mind filled with nothing but doubts. Now is the time to raise the shield of faith. Martin Luther suffered greatly trying to please God and lead a perfect life. Then the Holy Spirit shone a light on a number of scriptures including *Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.* Use your belief and faith in Christ as your shield to every fiery arrow the Devil shoots at you; don't use your own timber framed walls and thatched roofs of self-justification. Say like Luther cried out “The just shall live by faith!” We are not truly just in ourselves, but because Christ has justified us we are the JUST!

Now you need to protect your head; this is the control room of all your activities, the bridge of a ship, and the cockpit of the aeroplane: *take the helmet of salvation.* Imagine driving this racing motorbike - you have all your leathers, gloves and boots on but no helmet! How foolish would that be!
So what is the “helmet of salvation”? It is the knowledge of salvation and it guards your mind from any information seen, heard or thought that is contrary to that

truth. No matter what the Devil throws at you in your heart you can say and know *Romans 10:11* "For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." *12* For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; *13* for **"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."** When the Devil says ANYTHING (and usually he will choose scripture in the wrong context) contrary to that, dismiss it completely no matter how convincing or intelligent it sounds in your situation, because it is a lie.

So far everything in the armour has been to defend you in the event of an attack. Now we look at the one and only, all-powerful weapon at your disposal: *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*. This sword is hanging on the "belt of truth" you are wearing, because the word of God is the truth. Christ prayed for us and said, *John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth*. This is a weapon of mass sanctification. It cleanses and corrects everything that is in its path. Notice it is the sword of the Spirit, not the sword of your intellect or the sword of ritual ceremonies. You must allow the Holy Spirit to literally possess you and wield the weapon through you. This is absolutely critical. Why? Because going back to the beginning of this chapter Paul says in *Ephesians 6:12* **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** We must never forget we are in a spiritual battle. We cannot fight spiritual forces with human weapons. But if the Spirit of God takes the Word of God residing in our hearts and enables you to thrusts it into your enemy no matter how big, the enemy dissolves like an ice cube in a boiling kettle.

The Devil does not want you to experience the Love and Life of God. Never be distracted and ignore, or leave off, any part of the armour because your spiritual life depends on it: don't be *mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God*. Only receiving His love will make you feel ALIVE!

Chapter 9

... a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal

The whole aim of the Devil is to convince you God doesn't love you and make you completely turn away from Him. He will quote countless rules and regulations from scripture with his interpretation that he says you must obey to earn a little bit of God's love. Jesus puts it the other way around, stating that love is the governing factor, the very reason for the existence of the other laws. Love is what the other laws hang on. *Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments **depend the whole Law and the Prophets.**"*

Paul in his famous section about love says, *1 Corinthians 1:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* He goes on to point out that all manner of actions without love is pointless. It is love that gives reason to all the other laws. Without love they are harsh and stressful.

Try reading out loud a section of scripture with a harsh, hateful and vindictive voice. How does it feel? Doesn't it make the writer of those words seem harsh? Now read that same section with love and compassion in your voice. Is it different? I certainly think it is! So which is right?

If your concept of God is the former: an angry old man wielding a stick at you, then everything you read will be viewed through those eyes. If you obey that first commandment to love the Lord your God completely, you will not see Him as an angry old man. Scripture states "God is love"; Christ looked on the crowds and wept with compassion for their condition. Those who have experienced God's love show it to others. Not just the exceptional ones like Mother Teresa but countless ordinary folk who have 'tasted and seen that the Lord is good'.

The choice is yours. Christ told the story of a king who invited some people to his son's wedding but they all excused themselves. So the king said, *'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast. Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen. Matt 22:8-14*

Well if God is the King then He certainly is being kind inviting everyone to the feast. That's good because I can see it could include me but what does it mean, *"For many are called, but few are chosen."* Does it mean I might not be chosen? How do I know it's not going to be me with *weeping and gnashing of teeth*? Still sounds like the old man with the big stick!

The hearers of the story Jesus told would have known something we wouldn't. When a host invites people to a wedding in that culture HE PROVIDES THE GARMENTS! As each guest comes in the host gives everyone the appropriate clothing. For someone not to have the right covering means THEY HAVE REJECTED IT.

God has provided our salvation, Christ has paid for our sin, He has given us a white gown of His righteousness. When we come to the table God does not look at our unworthiness and failings, he looks at the white gown of his son's righteousness which HE HAS GIVEN and WE HAVE CHOSEN to wear.

Yes, many are called but few choose to accept the free gift of the wedding garment. So who is to blame, an all loving compassionate God or the individual for not accepting the free gift of salvation, open to ALL?

Yet God still keeps trying; He is so patient and long-suffering. As Peter says, *But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.* 2 Peter 3:8-9

Like all the testimonies in this book, and many others show, whatever your need God can meet it. Whatever binds you, God longs to set you free and have you "Alive with Love." His Love! ALL are called but YOU have to choose whether to accept and be ALIVE WITH LOVE! Just look into His eyes and see the love that He is pouring out on you, like the guy in the introduction did.

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