

The Contender

The magazine of Edmonton Baptist Chapel



What use
are we making
of our gifts?

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us
we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:20

CONTENTS

<u><i>Making the Most of What We Have</i></u>	<u>3</u>
<u><i>A Family With no Religious Ties</i></u>	<u>9</u>
<u><i>What I Needed to Hear, But Didn't!</i></u>	<u>13</u>
<u><i>A Religious Mix</i></u>	<u>17</u>
<u><i>A London Rebel</i></u>	<u>20</u>
<u><i>The Influence of a Grandmother</i></u>	<u>22</u>
<u><i>Greek & Orthodox, but not a Christian</i></u>	<u>28</u>
<u><i>Religious & in Love with Drink</i></u>	<u>31</u>

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SUNDAY SERVICES

Gospel service 10:30-11:30
Teaching service 17:00-18:15

We recommend the morning gospel service for first-time visitors.

True happiness and fulfilment depends on us knowing who we are, and knowing the Lord, our God and Creator. People of all ages, from different backgrounds and cultures, have found peace with God and discovered the reality of Christian conversion.

Here, beginning on page 9, are the testimonies of just seven such people.

Sunday School

During term times we have two classes for Primary School children

Years 3 & 4
and
Years 5 & 6

A few of the previous editions of **The Contender**



MAKING THE MOST OF WHAT WE HAVE

You may have heard of a very talented youngster who was musically so gifted that she could play numerous instruments very well—and yet she works in a supermarket. “What a waste”, you may think. Or someone who is a ‘natural’ when it comes to dealing with people’s injuries or sicknesses. They seem to have a tremendous knowledge of treatments and medicine. A more patient and courteous person you couldn’t hope to find—but they are working in a DIY store. “What a waste...”. I am sure you could come up with other examples but what of you dear reader? Are you rightly making the most of what you have?

Long ago God sent His prophet Jeremiah to warn the people because they were not making the most of what He had given to them. He told them that they would soon experience severe difficulties.

“I will consume them,” says the Lord. “No grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things I have given them shall pass away from them.”



They had been blessed with a plentiful supply of both *grapes* and *figs*.

These were the main fruits in the land, especially in and around Jerusalem. Good harvests meant the people had all they needed. To them, the picture of success and prosperity—or as we might say today, having made it in life—was a man sitting by his fig trees or grape vines.

The gifts more than the Giver

And yet the very things God had given to them as blessings and helps, provisions and necessities, had become a snare to them. Instead of being taken up with God, depending on Him and expressing gratitude for what He had provided, it was the grapes and figs that had become the focus of their attention. They depended on these seasonal, vulnerable, thirst quenching and stomach satisfying foods for their main source of security,

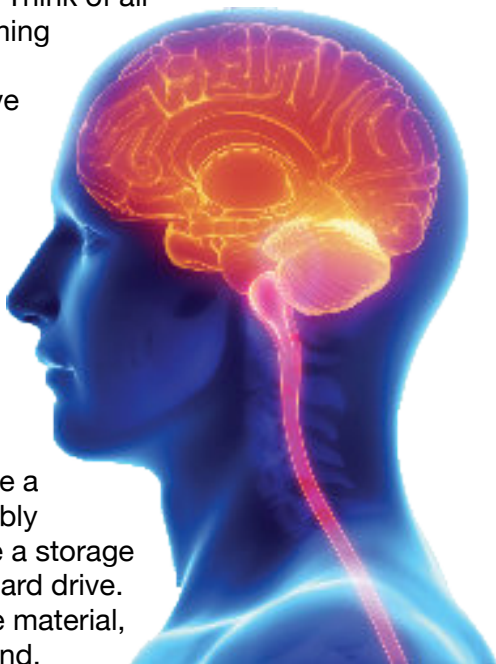
happiness, peace and feelings of well being—rather than God who had provided everything necessary for the growing, producing, and harvesting of them. The blessings God had given, had replaced the God who had given them. Apart from their religious habits and lip service God was not in their lives. So God warns them that He is ready to remove their security and take away these signs of prosperity and delight.

What a picture of us all in the 21st century! We have come into the world with minds and hearts—tremendous gifts, full of potential. How can evolution account for our minds and hearts? It cannot come up with a credible explanation for the human experience. To the evolutionist we are simply a bunch of molecules, or as one atheist described us, “cosmic broccoli”, blobs with electrical firings taking place within us.

Our mind

Our mind is put to work almost immediately and continues working throughout our life. We plan, scheme, reflect, reason, learn, recall, memorise—you get the picture? God has not given us a mind that is simply an empty box we have to fill—it is an incredible faculty.

Our mind is separate from our brain and yet linked to it. All the processes, data storage devices—just think of a smart phone that has facial recognition, or the software that is able to recognise faces and then group your photographs accordingly. Think of all the hours and effort, all the programming and trialling to get the phone and software to do that. Yet you and I have been given a mind with such recognition abilities and features that we are able to recognise faces and places, roads and landmarks even years later—even when certain things have changed. And with nothing but a sound we are able to recognise voices, as well. Our brain and mind are constantly assessing standards, filtering information, comparing, contrasting as if they have a massive memory chip with an incredibly powerful set of processors—let alone a storage capability that is far better than any hard drive. There is such interaction between the material, the brain, and that which isn't, the mind.



And what we actively and knowingly 'input' into our minds is really quite little and limited compared to what already exists—why, we can just 'see' something, and it is there! And yet it appears to have unlimited expansion facilities, so that in the first 7-10 years of our life it can take in, absorb, and expand in an amazing way so that 70 years later that which was taken in will still be remembered. Even those who suffer from some form of dementia are often able to remember things from years ago.

Our heart

And then there is our *heart* and its capacity for great depth and variety of feelings and emotions. Love is not just one fixed feeling. God has made us so that we are able to love at different levels. For example, I can love my brother and sister, and yet it is not the same as the love I have for my wife. And then there are other emotions and feelings such as feeling hurt, grief, joy and happiness—and within



each there is considerable variation and degrees depending on the cause or causes, as well as those involved. We know affection and friendship, companionship, pity, sympathy, empathy, desire, frustration, and so much more. Our heart can even overpower our mind and bring it into subjection—hence we might say, "My mind is telling me one thing, but my heart is telling me another". And the heart invariably wins.

God has gifted us with our mind and heart and we depend and rely upon them. We invest time and energy in them, value and appreciate them.

The right use of our minds and hearts

And of course there is a right and legitimate use for our minds and hearts. God hasn't given them to sit unused and to be of no benefit to us. Of course we are to care, love, learn, and so on—but what we have done is make much of them at the expense of God who gave them. He has given us minds to contemplate Him, think of Him, learn of Him; to reason and think of how we treat Him. He has given us hearts and minds so that

we can respond to His love and blessings with thankfulness and meaningful worship. We have hearts that provide us with the capacity for meaningful love in response to His great love.

And yet we think more of the gifts than we do of God. Our hearts and minds (just as the grapes and figs to that ancient people) have become a snare to us. They have lured us away from God and the appreciation of who He is and what He has given. They have drawn us away from living and expressing thankfulness with a deep sense of dependency upon Him. We are using our minds and hearts as if we produced them. But God warns us, and though for us it's not a matter of figs and grapes being removed, it is a picture of when everything good and enjoyable will be forever taken from us by the just and holy God we have shunned.

"I will consume them," says the Lord. "No grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things I have given them shall pass away from them."

If we have never sought the forgiveness of God by having truly repented of our sins; if we have not put our trust in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of all our sin and asked for a new life, then this will be the experience of every one of us. And the picture here is *not only* pointing to that day when our minds and hearts will no longer be able to take in and respond in repentance and faith to the great love of God in Christ. We may well experience something of this in this world. The gifts and blessings of God that have been a snare to us, that we have delighted in, taken comfort in and used for our own advancement, they may be taken away or diminished in some way also.

Romans 2:4

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

Age considerations

Are you an older person? How is your mind and memory? Is it as sharp as it was 40, 50 or more years ago? Can you remember more easily your school teachers than you can what you did last week? What about your heart and feelings? Are you more hard hearted now so you don't "feel" things as you once did (assuming you can remember how you felt)? Do you find you are not so sensitive so that much of the bad news now passes over you with little, if any, emotional response?



Are you concerned about suffering from dementia—anxious in case you start ‘losing your mind’? Are you worried that you will no longer experience the friendships, love, closeness, and the connection because you no longer remember people or recognise them? Why the concern, the anxiety? Is it because these things are your main source of happiness, security and joy?

Even in this life much of what we come to rely upon and trust in lets us down. We then become disappointed and frustrated. We can enjoy a good friendship—only to have it turn sour. Some people have just one or two close friends--and then something happens and that close and exclusive friendship is broken and dissolved—and what then is left?

Age is a constant warning of what life offers—such as wear and tear, deterioration, diminishing of our strength, hearing, sight, reflexes, and so on. Who wants to get old?

Christians are often accused of being escapists—but we are the realists, facing the issues head on. We have so many warnings throughout our life but we are not prepared to acknowledge them and learn the lessons. And before you say, "That's just how it is, the genes, getting old...", but Who is the One in control of the world, overseeing everything? Who is the One who knows how many hairs are on your head and every bird that falls to

the ground? Who raises up world powers and empires only to humble them and later bring them to their knees? God! God holds your life in His hands and gives you every breath you take. God has made sure your heart has beaten somewhere between 3600—5400 beats during the last hour. That is not “just how it is”—genes or no genes—it is God bringing to pass His good and sovereign will according to His divine plan. It is God in His grace, showing mercy and manifesting His patience—giving you time and opportunity to humble yourself and seek Him and His forgiveness.

Are you a younger person? Have you experienced the anxiety in seeking to remember so much information as exams approach? Do your plans and dreams depend on how

well you do in those exams? Are you already thinking of where to study further, what you want to do, where you want to be when you leave university? Where did your mind come from? Why do you feel so strongly about the exams, the courses, the choice of university? Why are you passionate about what you see as your future? I am not suggesting you are not thankful to your parents for financial help, support, encouragement—but they did not give you your mind

and heart. They did not give you your abilities—and even if say you have inherited certain things from a parent such as intellectual abilities—somewhere down that line going back, what you have inherited had to be first given to someone, didn't it?

I hope you understand my reasoning in all this—and I haven't even mentioned our will, and have only just touched upon our bodies, its strength and so on. There is so much more that we have been given by God as gifts. Make the most of what you have. Use your mind and heart wisely and for the supreme purpose they have been given to you—to know the forgiveness of God and receive a new life from Him. Come to one of our Sunday morning gospel services, or contact us to know more of how you might seek and find the Lord.



A FAMILY WITH NO RELIGIOUS TIES



I was born in Hong Kong and into a family which didn't profess any religion or have any religious affiliations. As a result I grew up in a predominantly secular society, though many people were very superstitious. Although my parents never had the opportunity to learn about Christianity they first sent me to a Catholic Primary school, and then to a Christian Secondary School. It was there I came to learn about the Bible and the basic teachings of the Christian faith. However, as part of the Chinese history and culture lessons we also learnt the basic ideas associated with Buddhism and the Chinese legends of the origin of the world. To me, they all sounded like legends! Even so, I studied them enough in order to pass my exams with good grades, but I did not

engage my mind with any deep thoughts about the meaning of life.

I had no interest in God, but because of the Christian influence in school we felt we were in an environment that protected us from many bad things. Every morning in Secondary school there was a Bible reading and we sang hymns, but all the time I was totally blind to the spiritual things and realities in life. All that concerned me at that age was achieving excellence in my academic studies and extra-curricular activities so that I would have a good enough profile to guarantee me a place in a top university. Students in Hong Kong were taught to work hard and believe in the fact that, "we have to earn for anything we want to get", which of course encouraged us to be self centred and proud.

Life going downhill

When I eventually went to university I no longer came into contact with any Biblical teaching, but unknown to me at that time God had begun a work in my life. Personally my life, and things in general, were getting worse. After finishing my education and a year of working in Hong Kong, I came to the UK for another year of internship and to continue my studies in Glasgow.



At the university in Hong Kong I was quite busy with my studies, physical exercise, and socialising with friends and family. Even so, I experienced a feeling of emptiness in my heart. I was still really blind to spiritual realities. Looking back now I see that during that time I was more sinful than I had been in my Secondary school days. In the universities in Hong Kong, and the

UK, I was more open and curious to try anything that I had not been exposed to when I was in the Christian Secondary school.

Proud and insecure

Having become quite proud my intention was to work hard so as to earn well and achieve in life.

Though very confident I was at the same time insecure and uncertain about my future. I had no sense of peace and even though I worked

hard, had friends and family, my life felt so empty and unfilled. I didn't lack things or activities, and yet I felt an emptiness inside. In the UK I tried to fill that emptiness

with things I hadn't tried before, as well as getting to know new people. Being so insecure I focused on myself, not thinking about others or what was right or wrong.

A lost soul

At some point, after all those years of living a really sinful life, and with deteriorating relationships

with others, I began to realise that I was spiritually lost, that there was more to life than I had at first thought. I didn't feel it when I was a student, but later on I realised that I could not rely on myself or trust myself. All the questions about what life is, why I was here, the purpose and meaning of life—the questions which were asked when I was still in my Secondary school, they all came flooding back to my mind.

Questions in need of answers

At the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, I realised I needed to look for some answers to these basic questions. I went to

a church, but the teaching was not helpful and didn't address my concerns.

One day I asked one of my former friends from the University what she did on the weekends, and she told me about the church in London she attended and invited me to come with her. I was familiar with words like “salvation” but I didn't understand what it meant. But now, from the beginning, I felt that the teaching was directed to me, even though I was just a face in the congregation. I had a boyfriend at the time but after two years, and the relationship having run its course, I started attending the



church's classes on the truths of the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible.

God's gracious work

God was bringing about many changes in me and I started to realise how sinful I was in the sight of the holy God. I began to pray, although at the beginning I prayed for others and not for myself. I was beginning to see something of the bad and sinful things I had done in my life. I felt really horrible. It was then that I started to realise I was a sinner and a rebel before God and that Jesus Christ was the only Person who could forgive me and reconcile me to God. He, the eternal Son of God, had come into this world in order to suffer and die in the place of those who would put their trust in Him as their Saviour and Lord. I needed to truly repent and ask for God's forgiveness. And so, with a deep sense of my sin and guilt I put my trust in Jesus Christ and yielded my life to Him.

As the days passed I noticed that certain aspects of my life and outlook, as well as my desires, had begun to change. In particular I was losing interest in the worldly things that had been part and parcel of my life.

Although I did see significant changes in myself, for a while I did wonder if I was really a child of God and reconciled to Him. Sometimes there were temptations

from my unsaved friends, as well as some doubts. But with God's help, and an increasing understanding of His Word as I read it, I learnt to continue with my new life while trusting in Him and the promises He has given in His word the Bible.

Safe and secure

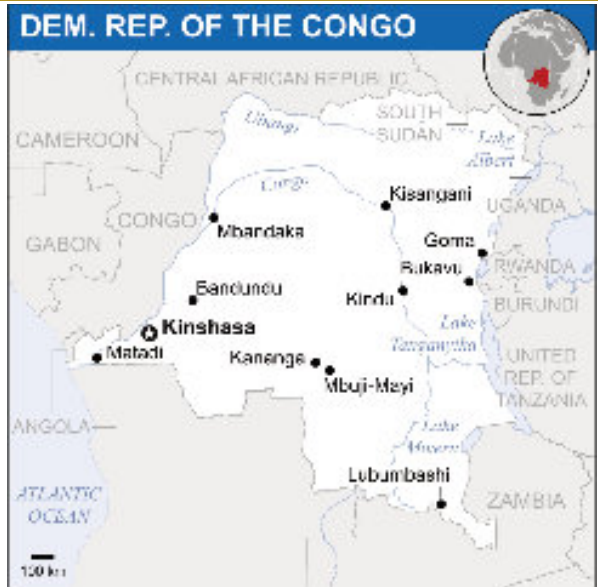
One thing which really changed in my life was the fact that up until God intervened and brought me to trust in the Lord Jesus, I had steered clear of any regularity or discipline. Attending the church, its services and classes, was the first regular thing in my life for years.

I can see now how that has influenced other areas of my life also. At different stages in the past I worried about many things, such as finishing university, starting a family, planning my life. I have now learnt that God's ways and timings are much better. I am so very grateful for the way the Lord continues to help and bless me.

Although I don't know the future, and what lies ahead for me, I no longer need to worry or be unduly concerned. My desire is to serve the Lord who has been so gracious and merciful to me and continue to grow in my Christian faith. The saving God who by His grace has brought me to know Him, He will continue to keep and guide me just as He has promised.
Y.L.

WHAT I NEEDED TO HEAR - BUT DIDN'T!

I was born in the Democratic republic of Congo a few years before the start of the war and the violent civil unrest that followed in 1999. My mother and I left Congo to live temporarily in Paris before eventually settling in the UK. I was raised in a fairly religious family who insisted on attending church every Sunday and so over the years we attended various Pentecostal churches in Congo, France, and in London.



Church attendance

I never questioned why we went to church or why we believed in God. I believed there was a God because I had been raised to do so and I was always told it was the right thing to do. As a child I often prayed, even though I didn't know what kind of God I was praying to or if he ever heard me. Many of the churches we attended encouraged prayer, the speaking in so called tongues and the gift of healing, but very few of those Pentecostal churches preached and taught about the sinfulness of human nature or our need to repent of our sin and place faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ as the only One who can forgive us and save us from wrath of God we deserve, just as the Bible describes. As I grew older and into my teens any thoughts and concerns I may have had about my life and soul faded. I rarely thought about whether my life, the things I thought about and said — let alone the things I did and felt — were pleasing to a holy God. By the time I was a teenager I had almost entirely given up on praying as I increasingly felt my prayers were never answered.

During my teenage years a lot about me changed. The friends I had, the music I listened to, the way I would speak — and even

worse, my attitude—it all changed. I became rebellious in school and towards my mother and yet I still considered myself a Christian. By now even though I had stopped going to church with my family I had begun attending a local church's youth service with my best friend.

Losing interest

Looking back now, I can see that the ministers of that youth service sought to challenge us about the dangers of our sins but at the time the influence from both the friends and the world was far too strong. I wasn't ready to give up my friends or how I lived my life; I was unwilling to give up my independence and commit to living as God commanded. After a few years I lost all interest in going to church.

It was between the ages of 17 to 19 that I found myself in a toxic relationship which took me even further from God. The relationship caused me both emotional and physical pain, a lot of both. As is often the case in such situations, I even hurt the people around me. I began to find it very difficult to call myself a Christian because my life was so contrary to God's Word. And yet such is the grace of God that during the worst moments in this relationship I started to realise that my life apart from God was meaningless and that I couldn't pin my hopes for happiness, peace

with God and eternal life on a relationship, my education, or my friends. It was dawning on me that all these things were temporary pleasures. I now began to be deeply concerned and anxious about my relationship with God (actually the lack of a personal relationship). I knew a day was coming when I would have to stand before Him and give an account of my life. And yet, even with this increasing awareness of my need I still managed to suppress these thoughts and my conscience and continue with my sinful life.

A friend's challenge

At 19, I was preparing to go to university when my best friend told me that she had heard the gospel and how Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, the only one who is able to freely forgive sins and change lives because of His life and death on the cross of Calvary. God had not only forgiven her sin, He had changed her and given her a new life. I was puzzled! We had always gone to church together and yet she is telling me that only now she has become Christian.

She invited me to a Baptist church where I heard this life changing message for the first time. I heard how the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God became a man and as the God Man, lived a sinless life. On the cross He suffered the unimaginable punishment for the sin of all those

who would repent and put their trust in Him. There on the cross He suffered the eternal punishment of God in the place of sinners so that all who turned away from their sins and trusted in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation (and not in anything they were or did) would be saved. In the past when I had thought about my sins I would feel sad and even cry, but having heard this wonderful gospel message of the love of God to undeserving sinners like me I felt a deep sorrow. I became ashamed of the life I had been living. I could no longer make excuses for the way I lived, or pretend that I was a Christian. God had opened my eyes to the truth that He hates sin because He is holy. The realisation of my sinfulness and lack of thankfulness for God's grace and mercy for all my years of rebellion against Him broke my heart. I felt a huge burden on my heart and I began to plead

to God in prayer, asking for His undeserved forgiveness. I wanted to know Him and have Him change my life. I was given a small booklet on the gospel of John in the Bible and I started reading it everyday.



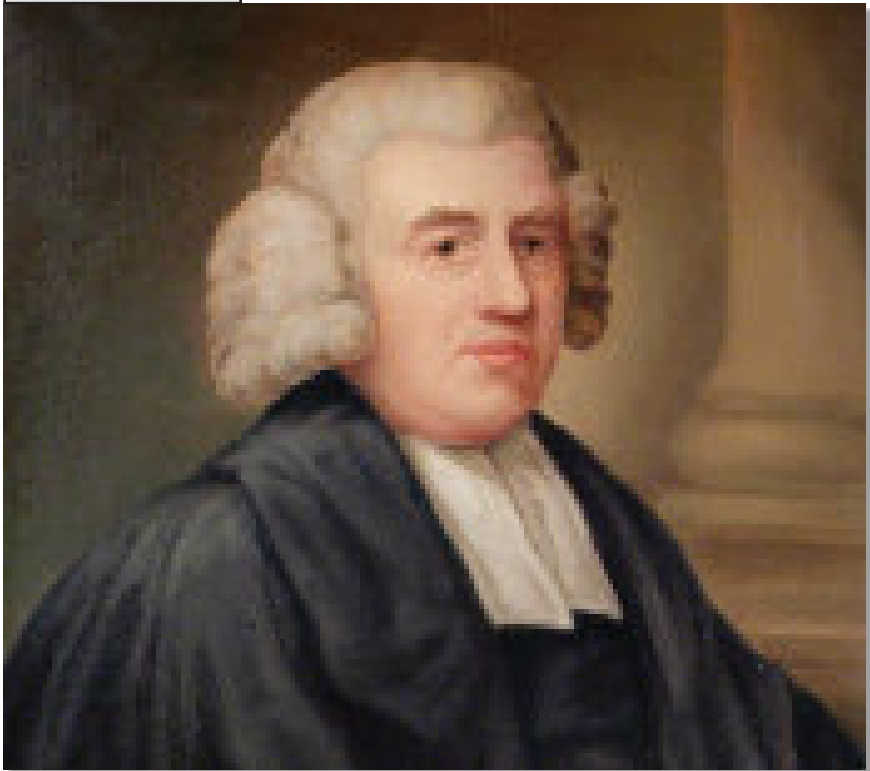
To my surprise I began more and more to understand this revelation from God. Before I had been blind to my sins and deaf to God's Word. Now I could see and understand. I no longer wanted to do the sinful things I used to do, I had a new desire—to please and serve God.

The amazing love of God

To think that Lord Jesus Christ had suffered and died in order that He could freely forgive me; that He rose the third day from the dead so that He could give me a new life, the realisation of this was so humbling and amazing, no wonder that former slave trader John Newton wrote that hymn:

Amazing grace! How sweet the
sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

A portrait of John Newton



'Twas grace that taught my heart to
fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!

I felt a joy and a peace that I still struggle to put into words. God had changed my heart and opened my eyes to who and what I really was in His sight, a rebellious and ungrateful sinner. But God has shown His great love because while I was still a sinner Christ died for me. Having been saved I have the assurance from the Word of God that He will keep me and never leave me or forsake me. *N.M.*

A RELIGIOUS MIX

I was born into a family that were not Christians with my father being the only one to profess any kind of religiousness – Russian Orthodoxy.

As a child he would occasionally take me to a service in the Russian Orthodox church, while taking me to the Sunday schools held by various denominations at other times.

Disordered, depressed & depraved

I had a little exposure to some nominally Christian writings in my teenage years, along with the occasional religious thought, but I was far from being ready to repent and give my life over to Jesus Christ. At that time I was already heading towards having a disordered lifestyle, and had even begun to take drugs on a regular basis. Added to that, and possibly my drug taking was a factor, but I was almost permanently and deeply depressed throughout my adolescence. Not having a natural and jovial disposition I was living in



constant darkness, desperation, loneliness, and what I now see was a state of helplessness. Hope was absent from my life.

When I left the United States in order to take up my studies at a Paris university my already deplorable condition took a serious turn for the worse. The darkness that I had known as a teenager grew increasingly deeper because of my idolatry. Yes, I said idolatry! Living in a big city my gods became social ambition and pleasure, and I found myself captivated and completely under their control. Even basic notions of good and evil, as well as acceptable behaviour, began to disappear from my mind. As the years passed I began to indulge in lusts that out of decency I will not now name. These lusts would have led me to total destruction had not

God intervened in and interrupted my life in a wonderful way. He rescued and saved me quickly thereafter. One consequence of the type of corruption I had brought upon myself was noticeable in my speech. I had become so vulgar, offensive and crass, that even by today's low standards I shocked most people—and I took pleasure in doing so. People were beginning to think of me as slightly deranged, and indeed the disorder in my life was so deep that I was losing the ability to function in my normal everyday life of work, etcetera.



A friend's transformation

By the time I come to the end of my university studies I was reaching the point where some serious disaster was just around the corner. It was at this time that a former high school friend had begun posting religious comments (such as verses from the Bible) on Facebook. It was clear to me that something dramatic and

transforming had taken place with him because he was someone I used to drink and smoke with in my high school days. This obvious and deep seated change in him deeply impressed me, and even though I refused to admit it to myself, it began bothering me in a very persistent fashion.

Something was happening to me, but I didn't really understand what as all the extremely limited exposure I had had to the Christian faith was by now deeply buried in and obscured by my sinful life. I began reading books that defended the Christian faith in a rational and logical way, books that interacted with and answered the arguments brought against Christianity. And then I started watching videos of a Catholic priest that had been uploaded to Youtube. As yet I was not reading the Bible and I certainly didn't understand what "sound doctrine" was or that I needed God to change my life. Even though I had

not repented of my sin at this time, I did feel a strong desire to learn more about God

Reality check

Shortly afterwards, I moved to London where I began learning more about the Christian faith via the internet. Having now stopped

watching the Roman Catholic videos I began to read the Bible and take it more seriously. I was now feeling joyful with a sense of hope, while

at the same time beginning to understand that my life in its present form was unacceptable to God.

I turned away from my previous forms of entertainment and pleasure, and was quickly convinced that I needed to find a church where the Bible was taught and lived out in the life of its members. I began searching on the internet for a church. Having listened to a few sermons on line from some churches I came across one which had video recordings of their Pastor's sermons. Having listened to some I was convinced this was what I had been seeking.



The transforming of my life by the grace of God

Every day I marvel at the powerful changes that God has wrought in me since He brought me to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. I think back to how radically different I was in those past years. The constant

depression and hopelessness; the darkness, hatred, and deep perversion—all washed away by the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many people that lead at least superficially

decent lives before God by His grace draws them to Himself and converts them. I was not such a person. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that my life had plumbed the depths of human sin and darkness. In Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, I have found joy and peace that does not depend on circumstances and worldly achievements. The Bible provides me with the spiritual food my soul needs, as well as instruction for my mind, and has helped me have mental stability and happiness that was completely beyond my thoughts in the past. A.G.

A LONDON REBEL

I was born and brought up in North London and during my teenage years I became a very rebellious human being. Even when I left school I was in a spiral of decline! I didn't care about anyone, it was all about self and what I could get out of life. I disrespected and dishonoured my parents. I was breaking the law, and I certainly didn't care about God! I mocked anyone that was remotely religious no matter what faith. I even started hating religion because I thought it was the cause of all the world's problems.

A shock!

In 2009, my wife told me she was pregnant with twins. That news came as a shock as I didn't expect us to have kids so soon. The news acted like flicking a switch in me. I started thinking about myself and how I had been living my life, a sinful life. I didn't want my children to live the way I had been. My brain was in overdrive. This was a big and serious responsibility! I remember thinking to myself, "I don't deserve children, not after the way I have been living".



An accessible Bible to read

At the time I was working in a London restaurant. I had a friend and he was working at my father's place of work, a 24 hour mini cab office. This friend would share with me certain things that were going on his life and what had happened

to him in the past. This led us onto talking about religion. Although he was a fairly new Christian at the time he shared his testimony with me. It really made me think, and I wanted to know more. I kept going to see him specifically to ask him questions. Eventually he told me to go and read the Bible. He said I could download it onto my phone. So I did. This way I could now read the Bible anywhere and anytime, and no one would know that I was reading it.

I remember travelling from Cheshunt in Hertfordshire into Central London for my job at the restaurant. I started reading the Bible on my phone while travelling in on the train. I started at the beginning, Genesis chapter 1. As I continued to read Genesis it explained the creation of our world and the entire universe—how God created the heavens and the earth and all the living things. I read of Adam and Eve and the Fall. I read one page at a time in the beginning because I was reading the King James Version (translation) of the Bible, which had been recommended to me, and at first I found it difficult. I stuck with it though. At the time I didn't understand a lot of the Old Testament, but the first few chapters of Genesis and Exodus chapter 20 about the giving of the Ten Commandments and what they were, those stuck in my mind the most.

A gift of two beautiful babies

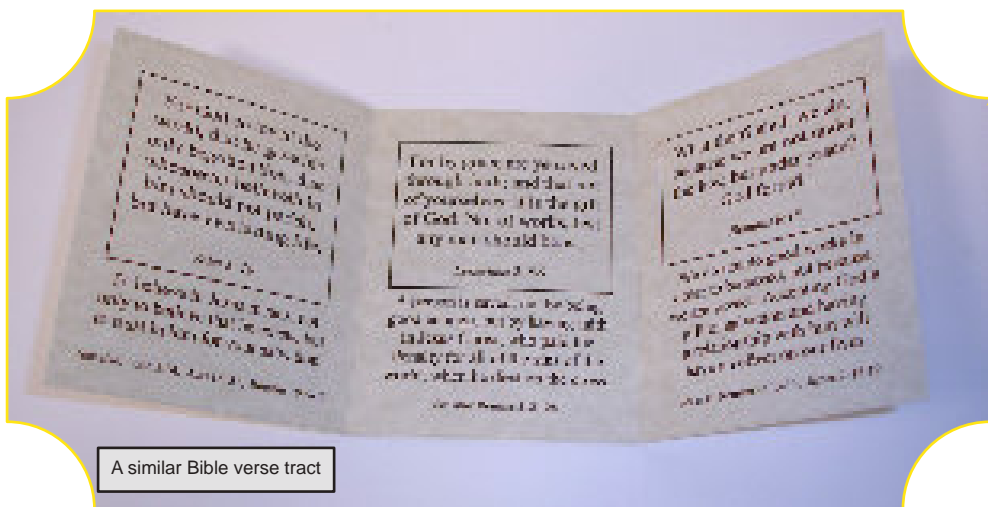
Finally the day had come for our new borns to enter the world. I was looking forward to meeting these two beautiful babies. Out came our first child. When they tried to deliver our second child there was a problem. The baby was not 'engaged' and in the right position to come out and so they had to perform an emergency Cesarean. I was told to go and sit in another room. In that room on my own I actually offered up a heartfelt prayer to God to save my child and my then wife. I promised Him that if He did I would do whatever He wanted me to do. In minutes the baby was delivered. Thanks be to God! God is truly gracious and merciful. I owe everything to God. Why was I allowed these two beautiful children? I just couldn't understand it.

I continued studying God's Word, the Bible. I remember the Gospel of Matthew in particular and as I read it many things were convicting me, although I never repented and gave my life to Christ at the time. I never fully grasped it at that point in my life. I continued reading through the New Testament and my friend also gave me a gospel tract to read and DVDs to watch. The gospel tract was quoting verses of the Bible and exposing a dead works religion. This tract had the following Bible verses:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’”

nothing to offer and nothing to bring, yet God offers me the gift of eternal life. I didn't deserve this but the tract explained how He was willing to take me as I am with all the sins I committed. How could I turn this down? I repented and gave my life to Jesus Christ and took Him as my Saviour and Lord.



The good news

The tract explained that I was a sinner and how I needed to turn away in repentance from my sin. It told me to believe that Jesus Christ died for me, was buried, and rose from the dead. It even gave me a couple of examples of what to pray and how to pray. Eventually I understood why Jesus had come into this world, why He died on the cross, and what we must do to be saved. This was good news indeed, that a filthy and wretched sinner like me, with

My friend now became my brother in Christ. I was later baptised, which the Bible teaches is a visual aid, a picture to those who are present of what God has already done in the person's life spiritually. I was a new person with new desires and beginning this wonderful new life. As far as my old sinful life was concerned, I was now dead and I had been buried, as dead people should be. But God had given me a new life, as if I had been raised from the dead a new person. C.C.

THE INFLUENCE OF A GRANDMOTHER

As a child we lived with my grandmother (my mother's mother) for a while. My grandmother was a faithful and disciplined woman who loved God. The love she had for God meant she was concerned for us, not just in terms of our material needs but our souls. She wanted us to know the Lord Jesus and experience His saving and forgiving love also. As an expression of her love for God and care for us she would gather her children and grandchildren for family worship every evening before bed. We would read the Bible, sing hymns, and she would pray for what as a child seemed

like hours! In showing and expressing her love for us in this way she was not only being obedient to the Lord and the teaching of His Word, she was sowing the seed of His great love in our hearts also. Having reached my twelfth birthday, it was a sad time when my dear grandmother died, compounded by the fact that a month earlier my father had also passed away.

A difficult year

1993 was a difficult year for our family. As my mother was now the sole breadwinner it meant that she had to be away from home a lot.



During one of her 'away' times a cousin spoke to me of how the Lord Jesus had come from heaven; how He suffered, died and rose again so that He could freely forgive us of our sins and give us a new life. Sometime later he prayed a version of what is known as the 'sinners prayer' with me.

avoid 'succumbing' I would seek to end the phone conversation as I wanted no part in what I was convinced was a fad, a phase she would soon pass through. On one occasion when I visited her, she asked this simple question: "Do all religions lead to God?" What I said in response was somewhat

"Dear Lord, I know you are the only way to salvation and Heaven. Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God. I want you in my life. I am a sinner, forgive me" Amen."

An example of the "sinner's prayer"

I then began attending the Pentecostal church he went to, and was later baptised by immersion. I don't recall being taught much before I was baptised, and therefore its importance and what it meant was unclear to me as a thirteen year old. As it was, by 16 years of age I had stopped attending the church and it would be another 10 years before I was seriously challenged about spiritual matters and the needs of my soul.

My sister's question

While I was at university in 2005, my younger sister befriended an enthusiastic charismatic Christian from Uganda. Soon she was saying that she had become a Christian and she began talking to me about Christ and salvation. Her passion was bewildering, and to

shallow and vague, but in reply she expressed herself so clearly that it challenged the trustworthiness of my ideas. Even though I had kept God at arms length for years, I still thought of myself as a 'Christian'. I still believed in Him, though evidently not with enough conviction to rule out there being other 'paths' to Him. My sister's question wouldn't leave me and continued to provoke much thought and contemplation for many weeks.

One April evening in 2006, she called for a chat. During this not so unusual conversation, she surprised me by asking if I would like to know Jesus personally and have the assurance of salvation. I found myself accepting, though inwardly I was reluctant as I knew I would mean my life would be changed. Once again I prayed the

'sinner's prayer' and was pronounced a child of God. She then told me that the 'Angels in Heaven were rejoicing!' Almost immediately I seemed to develop a keen awareness of sinful tendencies in my life, and I began to curb certain behaviours. I now found I avoided going to pubs and clubs. I stopped drinking alcohol, swearing, and listening to popular and secular music of the day. My friends and acquaintances at university now thought I was strange.

In Glasgow I found a Presbyterian church to attend. For a time I was a regular attender but I found it was too rigid and dry. I had lost my taste for hymn singing!

Looking for a spiritual home

Shortly after my post-graduate

diploma I returned to London, but I didn't find a church right away and I was mostly relying on what I found online for my edification.

The following year I was something of a church nomad, visiting a number of churches as I looked to find a spiritual home. Some preached that God wanted us all to be wealthy and healthy, while others did not seem to know what the Bible taught and what they believed which resulted in the members having little concern and passion for God and His message of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ alone. And then there were others who were far away from what I was slowly learning about the Christian faith.

Nevertheless I kept up the search.

At the end of a service at one Central London church, I spoke to a young woman about my



situation. She recommended a church to me and wrote it down on a strip of newspaper, which unfortunately I lost.

One evening, a desperate prayer to the Lord for help cascaded into a wonderful answer from Him. An online search for 'Good Churches in London' led me to a blog in which a Baptist church was mentioned. It rang a bell and so I made up my mind to attend. The service was reverent and orderly and the sermon both instructive and helpful. The hymns too were rich in expression and so full of meaning. What an answer to prayer!

The hymn below is one I particularly remember:

Thy life was given for me,
Thy blood, O Lord, was shed
That I might ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead:
Thy life was given for me;
What have I given for Thee?

Long years were spent for me
In weariness and woe,
That through eternity
Thy glory I might know:
Long years were spent for me;
Have I spent one for Thee?

Thou, Lord, hast borne for me
More than my tongue can tell
Of bitterest agony,
To rescue me from hell:
Thou sufferedst all for me;
What have I given for Thee?

Doubts

I hadn't been attending the church too long when I began to doubt my salvation, whether God had really accepted and forgiven me. What if it was nothing more than a delusion on my part and that 'sinner's prayer' I uttered in 2006 amounted to nothing before God. Hearing the gospel preached exposed sin in every department of my life—my thoughts, attitudes, words and deeds. Was I really a 'new' person having and living a new life? Was the 'sinner's prayer' a real prayer that God heard? Did I mean the words my sister got me to repeat after her? What if it was just superstition?

And Thou hast brought to me
Down from Thy home above
Salvation full and free,
Thy pardon and Thy love:
Great gifts Thou broughtest me;
What have I brought to Thee?

O let my life be given,
My years for Thee be spent,
World-fetters all be riven,
And joy with suffering blent:
Thou gav'st Thyself for me;
I give myself to Thee!

Frances Ridley Havergal, 1836-79



I was having a hard time reconciling all the various and diverse spiritual influences from my childhood years and my grandmother, as well as the more recent past. Over time I came to see that my fears and conclusion had been wrong.

By God's grace, through the reading of the Bible, prayer, teaching, conversations with Pastors, elders, and friends I came to understand the main ideas and doctrines of the Christian faith—which gradually had me know I was a child of God, forgiven and in possession of a new life. God worked in my life, and opened my eyes to the truth. I can't fully

describe how it happened but like a certain blind man who was healed by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John, one thing I know is that once I was spiritually blind, but now I see.

Looking ahead

While my journey has been a winding and somewhat bewildering one I can now attest to believing that I am a child of God. I can say that because of who Jesus Christ is, and His life, suffering, and death on the cross of Calvary for those He would bring to repentance and faith, I will be able to share eternity with Him.

P.W.

GREEK & ORTHODOX, BUT NOT A CHRISTIAN



The inside of a typical
Greek Orthodox Church

I was born into a Greek family, baptised as an infant and brought up in the Greek Orthodox faith in Cyprus. As a child, and then later as a teenager, I would occasionally attend the church services and Sunday school. There I received the basic instruction concerning the teachings of the church, but not really any direct teaching and instruction from the Bible. I knew about God and believed in His presence, but my life and

instruction from the Bible. I knew about God and believed in His presence, but my life and behaviour was in no way that of someone who was a sincere follower of Jesus Christ.

Looking into other religions

While at university in Colchester, I became quite isolated and disillusioned with my life. I was unhappy with the choices I had made, family life, and what was just lack of guidance and interest

in terms of what I wanted to do with my life. It was during this time that I started to develop an interest in world religions. As I read about Buddhism and Islam I found myself wanting to find meaning in their teachings and practices as a way to add discipline, guidance, and direction to my life.

Up close and personal with the Bible

The first time I had any close and personal interaction with the Bible was during the last year of my University studies. I took the Bible out of my brother's personal library in London and started reading it with interest. I began with the first book, Genesis. Reading the Bible impacted my life in a significant way. I found it stimulating and

interesting to read, especially when relating in different ways the personal care of God, not just for mankind as a whole, but for individuals as He interacted and entered into covenants with them.

My studies having come to an end in the summer of 1995, I went back to Cyprus. At some point I was invited to a Charismatic church and I began attending their services. About three months later it was time to return to the UK in order to continue with my professional studies and seek full-time employment.

Back in the United Kingdom I was invited by non-denominational church group that originated from the United States to attend Bible studies in North London. During my seven and a half years there, I



became more involved and committed to the church's teachings. Looking back now, while it emphasised the inerrancy of the Bible and personal commitment to God, it lacked the soundness and the fullness of the Christian doctrine. People were not encouraged to put their trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. Instead they emphasised that one's works could save.

Now what? Now where?

Throughout this period I felt disillusioned with my faith, the love of God and God's providence for my life. I had lost sight of God and my faith was weak to the point that old sinful habits, affections and attractions came into my life.

During this time, I put my career and studies first which hurt the people closest to me. I was hesitant and resistant to change. I had become selfish and proud, not wanting to listen to anyone.

We didn't attend any church for a while until we moved to South London. Once there we attended some of the local churches and eventually settled down in the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Here we gradually found the encouragement of Scripture and the preaching from the Bible a remedy for our injured souls. The sermons of the Word and lifting the Lord's name during my visits at the Metropolitan Tabernacle have helped the healing process.

During that spiritually barren time when I was unfaithful to the Lord, He remained faithful and never stopped loving me and having His providential hand upon my life. He ripped apart a lot of wrong beliefs, hurts, and practices picked up in my past. He helped me to see more clearly the wrongs and traps of false doctrine and teaching and gradually He helped the healing process.

To God be the glory, great things He has done

I thank God for converting my soul, for His tender mercies and loving kindness to me, and praise Him over the way He has graciously dealt with my soul, and I owe everything to Him. To Him be all the glory and the praise! s.s.

To God be the glory! Great things He has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son;
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son:
And give Him the glory! Great things He has done!*

RELIGIOUS & IN LOVE WITH DRINK



Catholic Parish Church in Callan

I was born in Callan, a village in County Kilkenny, Ireland. Though I was surrounded by Roman Catholicism and brought up as a 'good Catholic', I found the world to be a far more exciting, interesting and stimulating place. It offered such variety; all I could want to keep me amused and entertained – the drinking, darts, and the betting shop.

Leaving Ireland

When I was 24 years of age I left Ireland and came over to England. It wasn't only the landscape that changed, what had been a village environment was replaced with the hustle and bustle of city life. Even so, what were to me the essentials, those familiar and well-loved activities of drink, darts and betting were still available and continued to feature prominently in my life. It should have come as no surprise with my lifestyle, but in 1979 my marriage broke up. The next 2 years were to me, at that time, a living hell. I used to wake up in the night thinking of my wife at work and then reflecting on where I was.

Whatever happened, wherever I was, I just could not get away from all the pain of it. Things only took a turn for the better when, after those two years, we finally got back together again. Even so, and probably predictably so looking back at how I was, five years later my wife found someone else and the pain and nightmare returned once again.

Death seemed the answer

It was a Monday evening. I finished work and went into the pub. I was drinking my first pint and I was in the pits of despair. As I drank the thought came into my mind, "Take your life. Commit suicide". Even



as I thought of it I knew it was wrong. My mind turned to my daughter, my son, and my father who lived in Ireland, but my agony was too great and I could not take that amount of pain, even for them. The thought was only to return the second time, "Go on, finish your life".

Crying out to God

What could I do? Where was relief to be found? There and then I cried out from my heart, "Jesus help me, please help me, I can't cope any more on my own". All the pain lifted from me and I was filled with a love beyond any love that I had ever known. From that moment my life was changed forever. The pain of my marriage breakup was taken away and never came back. Immersed and wallowing in self pity for all that

time I had felt very bitter and hateful towards my wife for the hurt that she brought upon me, but now I felt sorry for her and I came to see that contrary to how I had seen myself I was not a good husband or father. The next day I saw something of the beauty of creation – the blue sky, white clouds, the flowers and trees. I just hadn't noticed these before; their beauty had not been seen by me. What a contrast! What a dramatic change. The day before I had been in the pits of despair wanting to end my miserable life. Now it felt so good to be alive. My response to this change in my life was that I started going to mass every night after work, and twice on Sunday. I listened to the Bible readings and at the end of the first and second readings I was hearing that the Bible was the Word of God. To

hear that this was God's Word brought a desire into my heart, and a determination in my mind. I wanted to learn the Bible. Eventually I found a college that taught the Bible and I attended three evenings a week. I was still very much a Roman Catholic for even at that time I believed that my salvation was down to Jesus and Mary, the Saints, the Catholic Church, and my good works. But all that was about to change.

Jesus Christ, the only Saviour

One night at the college I saw in the Bible that it was Jesus Christ alone who saved me, that He is the only Saviour, with there being only one Mediator between God and man – the Lord Jesus Christ. I came to understand that He had taken the punishment due to me for all my sins when He died on the cross at Calvary and that upon true repentance and faith in Him He would convert my soul. This conversion experience had indeed happened straight away in the pub and I came to experience the

power of God in my life in other ways also. One night I knelt beside my bed

and asked the Lord to take away my desire for drinking and gambling and those desires were subsequently taken away from me. Three weeks later I asked Him to take away the desire to smoke – I had started when I was nine and had smoked for 31 years. The desire to smoke was taken from me and I have not been troubled with that desire for the last 22 years.

I was brought up in the Catholic Church, it was all I knew and I desperately wanted Roman Catholicism to be right. However, as I grew in my knowledge and understanding of the Bible I could see that the Catholic Church was completely out of line with the teaching of the Bible. This was especially so with the truths that matter. In particular, and the most important truth is the gospel—how a person is saved and made right with God. The Catholic church teaches Purgatory, a place of cleansing and denies the Scriptures that tell us that our sins were purged in Jesus Christ:



“...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” Hebrews 1:3-4

It teaches that we can pray to Mark and the Saints, while the Bible says there is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus:

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...” 1 Timothy 2:5

The Bible teaches that all the blessings come through Jesus Christ:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...” Ephesians 1:3

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11 and verse 28, Jesus didn't say “pray to Mary,” or “come to Me through my mother”, or “ask my mother or the Saints to

pray for you”. He said “Come to Me”.

“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”



That is what we must do. We are to approach the Lord Jesus directly, in humility and with a sincere heart, but directly, not through someone else.

“What must I do to be saved?”

So the most important thing to me now is to encourage people to read the Bible and to see God's truth for themselves. I still get difficult days but I thank God for His promise to me in the Bible that He will work it all out for my good

And we know that all things work together for good to those who

love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
Rom. 8.28

I thank Him for giving me assurance of salvation and the hope of Heaven when I die (1 John 5:13, Eph 1:13,14). When I look back on my life, there were times when I had great difficulties and I turned to God and asked Him to help me, but I had no intention of turning from my ways and handing over my life to Him, let alone live for Him and follow His ways. I just wanted Him to take away my trouble. But through the break up of my marriage I was now at a place where I was willing to turn from my sinful life and rebellious ways and follow Him. The words that I had said all those years ago, “I can’t cope anymore on my own”, that was the beginning, that is when it happened.

I had come to the place where I had no longer any hope in myself. I felt helpless and hopeless. God by His grace brought me to my senses and granted me a repentant heart and a believing mind, the place where I was willing to go to Christ and hand my life over to Him.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”
Matt. 16.24-26

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