

Peoples Stories

March 2007

Naomi Canning

Hey, I'm Naomi Canning and I go to Limavady Grammar School. I'm 15, almost 16 (I just like to call myself 16, it sounds better!) I have been a Christian for nearly nine months now, so not that long. I am still growing and learning about my faith and my relationship with God.

I guess I should begin with how I became a Christian, well I was brought up in faith, were I attended church regularly (didn't often miss a Sunday!), I went to Sunday School, learned my weekly lessons, went to Girls Brigade and said my prayers at night...but that was it really. It wasn't until I began confirmation classes that a switch triggered in my life. I had already heard everything that was said before, but this time it was more significant. I had my interview at the end of the course, were I was asked whether or not I was a Christian, I said 'yes', because, naïve as it sounds, at the age of 14 I didn't know the definition of a Christian! I thought because I attended church and said my prayers I was... but I was wrong! From the end of the course until the summer, I started to read my Bible and pray more often, but as the months passed it soon faded out...until Summer Madness!

It wasn't until Summer Madness, the largest Christian Festival in Northern Ireland, that I witnessed thousands of Christians truly and wholeheartedly worshipping God, it was amazing! The atmosphere was exhilarating and uplifting, yet I cried from start to end! I could write pages upon pages about Summer Madness...but I'll leave that up to you to find that out yourself! Observing so many committed Christians around me, feeling the real joy and satisfaction within those five days made me examine my life and I knew what I had to do. I asked the prayer ministry team to pray for me and that night I became God's follower!

I often question whether or not I am really a Christian. If I did something wrong or mostly not do enough and would continually ask myself, "How can I be a Christian? Am I kidding myself?" I found it hard, and often still do, to accept that I have been totally forgiven because of Jesus' amazing sacrifice for ME! Now I see people and I just want to tell them about Jesus and how they can get to know him...but I don't know how, I find telling others about my faith very hard, and prayer, and pleasing God as much as I can, but I just have to admit these shortcomings, ask God for help and recognise that I will fail!

My story didn't just happen overnight, ever since Summer Madness, I still have questions, but that is only natural! I know that I have a long way to go yet, but I am ecstatic about spending these days walking and learning with Jesus Christ always by my side, because the Bible says;

*"God began doing good work in you, and I am sure he will continue
it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again"*
Philippians 1:6

Isaac Hanna

Aaarh! Was I fed up? I had just been dumped by my fiancé and now she had sent me a letter. Just when I was starting to get on with things - I nearly threw it in the fire with disgust!

Yet this became a turning point in my life. I didn't throw the letter away - instead I read it. "Dear Isaac, I still love you", "I'm praying for you", "I'll never forget you," "we couldn't go on the way we were." "Maybe one day you'll become a Christian."

"Talk about pouring hot coals on my head", I thought. "Well, maybe someday." I really did not like church, though I still went to please my parents. I wanted to plan my own life, set my own goals. I ran my own business, I was a soldier, I didn't need help - that was for people who couldn't cope with life. I'd been through some tough scrapes, and didn't need God, "I'd proved myself".

But that night, with nowhere to go, and nothing good on the radio or TV, I began to think. Is there more to life? Maybe there is a real reason for living? Perhaps even a way to be really fulfilled and happy? I'd felt very empty since splitting up with Dianne. Work seemed to fill the empty space a bit. But you can't work all the time!

As I lay on top of my bed, Dianne's words went round and round in my head. When I first met her, I knew she was different. She was a Christian. The closer we became, the more I could see that her faith was real. This really challenged me and made me secretly wish I had what she had. As I lay in my bedroom, my head seemed to be going round and round. I didn't want to 'give in' to God. But could all this stuff be really true?

As I looked up I noticed something on top of my wardrobe, it was a Bible someone had given me when I was younger. Inside someone had written the words.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

"Wow", I thought that's just what I'll do. I started at the beginning and kept reading right through. I'd read parts of the Bible before, but they never made much sense to me. But now! It was as if God was speaking directly to me.

As I read I came to the point where I realized that I didn't deserve his love and had been living a completely self-centred life. And yet he loved me anyway - God had sent Jesus to die for me. He wanted me to respond to that, and allow him to change my life right around. With my head resting on my hands, I asked God to forgive me, change me, and come into my life. I promised to stop living life my way.

That night really was a turning point for me. I felt a sort of peace inside I'd never felt before. And a light-headed happiness. As the days went on, I slowly learned more about Jesus. I found he was helping me, day by day, to make decisions, handle difficult situations, and understand other people better. Life took on a whole new meaning.

I mislaid Dianne's letter years ago - but I'm glad I didn't throw it in the fire!

Cecil Ross

My spiritual journey is one of those long sagas that starts somewhere in the distant past with no particular starting point that I can put my finger on. Although, looking back, there are several times when I have felt that something moved me into doing things that I would never have considered doing, not realizing that God was at work in my life.

Growing up in a home where Sunday School and Church services were just part of the weekly routine is something that I am thankful for. My mother had been a Sunday School teacher before she was married so our lessons were drilled into us on Saturday evenings, not an unpleasant experience, as it was good to be able to come up to scratch on Sunday mornings.

One of the highlights of my spiritual journey was the day I was confirmed, when I confessed for myself what my parents had promised at my baptism and made my own personal response to Christ. This gave me a feeling of achieving something very significant in my life, in the sense that I was now taking a stand for God. It was a feeling of peace with God that stayed with me for some years. When I think back about that event now, I realize the peace was not something I achieved by earning it myself, but a gift given to me.

My spiritual journey went on. I continued going to church, not every Sunday as I took a lie in, (quite often), and when I did go it was mostly to please my parents and keep harmony between them and me. When I got married to Sandra, a good Presbyterian, the Church going got better and when our two children came along and they attended Sunday School I was back to going each Sunday. During this time I became more involved in Church work, becoming a leader in the Harvesters, becoming a Sunday School teacher and a Youth Fellowship leader. Bible Study on Wednesday evenings gave me a greater insight to the words in the Bible and this, along with the teaching and being involved with young people widened my view as to where I was and where I was going in my life.

As to when I was able to stand up and say that I was a Christian, I couldn't put a day, month or year to it, but I do know that I can and have done for a good number of years. That God given peace is back again and when times are rocky and things look

bleak, it is always there to carry me through. I don't always realize God's presence, as I get involved in my normal daily routine, the peace God gives gets blocked out until that time I need it.

This peace can only come from the one source, God in His love for me, of this I am convinced and convicted. Through this great feeling of peace I have had my faith in Jesus nourished and strengthened. It is strengthened because my prayers **are** answered, (not always the way I want) but answered they are as I have found on many different occasions. Having the knowledge that I don't have to contend with all the unwelcome attacks on my life using my own ingenuity is a great consolation and I am grateful that I will always have this with me.

My journey of faith in Christ has been an ongoing saga as I believe I have been led from one situation to another by Him as the life I had imagined as a young man never materialized - if it had I would never have sat down to write this story.

I believe that God has a plan for me, unwittingly and at many a time unwillingly, I followed it; unfortunately I also think that there were times when I didn't. There is in all this, the great consolation that God will never forget me as I did so many times forgot about Him. My great hope is that my story is ongoing - the way it has been - gaining momentum in strength of faith and commitment to the one who gave His all for me.

Rosemary Robinson

I grew up on a farm between Dungiven and Feeny. I was the eldest of a family of four. My mother made sure we went to Sunday school and Church every Sunday, often walking the two miles there and back. In those days all this was very normal.

At the age of eighteen years, I commenced my Nurse Training in the Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt. On my days off, I came home and helped my mother with the housework or worked on the farm with my father. It was hard and demanding work, but many of the lessons I learned in those early days helped to shape my future. I experienced the meaning of perseverance, hard work, discipline, loyalty, faithfulness and much more.

During my training in Magherafelt, a tent mission, conducted by Len Pickering, came to the area and was attended by many of the student nurses. Several of us realised that our lives had been missing the mark, or were heading in the wrong direction and we had been separated from God. A verse from the Bible that struck me was...

"He (Jesus) is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So I made a decision to turn away from my old life and accept the new life Christ offered. From that time on my life changed for the better.

Looking back, I believe God has had a plan and purpose for my life and he commands me to love Him with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and with all my strength and my neighbour as myself. I try, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to fulfil this command daily by offering everything I do to his glory, the focus being God, not myself.

Another tremendous source of strength and encouragement to me, have been the prayers of other Christians. The fact that someone would take the time or care enough to pray was humbling. I cannot thank God enough for those people who prayed for me over the years. The times of testing were many, but the good news is I emerged each time from these struggles with a stronger trust and faith in God.

My spiritual journey has not always been easy. On several occasions, I experienced difficulties for a variety of reasons. These times felt like a battle, but I have found, wars are not won in a day. But God brought me through these times.

The secret, I believe, lay in the fact that I always brought the problem before God. I poured out my heart to Him. I would also share the problem with trusted friends.

I also kept reading His word for guidance and strength. Most of my encouragement came from Paul's writings. I discovered an old bible recently and I couldn't believe how many verses I had underlined.

There have been times when I have been close to God and other times when I have drifted, but God has always been faithful to me. I remember on one occasion when I came back to God, as an added bonus, I received physical and spiritual healing following prayer the laying on of hands. God's love has been bigger than my expectations.

I would love others to find what I've found in my personal relationship with Jesus. And, like my hero Paul, I want to keep in the race, finish well, and hear the 'well done' of God.

Kathleen Quigley

One of the stories in the Bible that I can really relate to is the story of Timothy, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. Because both these women had been instrumental in helping Timothy become a Christian through their words and action.

Like Timothy I was born into a Christian family. My family shared all their faith in Christ with me and I remember much joy, love and faithfulness in our home as a result of my parent's devotion to Christ. So from an early age I knew that I needed to give my life to God and ask him into my heart and this is what I did. I asked Jesus into my heart.

During my teenage years I drifted away from God. I did things my way, not God's way. But, many friends and family were praying for me it this time. A verse that means a lot to me is this..

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The promise of God's mercy and forgiveness came true for me, and them, because I stopped rejecting God and decided to follow him again. From this experience of God's faithfulness in my own life, I believe that God will answer my prayers for others, including my family and friends.

Life has certainly not always been easy but God was always there for me, through the good times and the bad times. Even in my low periods of my life I turned to God and the Bible and he has never let me down. And I hold on to this promise that God gives in the Bible..

I will be with you, I will never leave you or forsake you.

Every Sunday I meet with a group of Christians in the Church just before the service, this time has been a great encouragement to me. I have found that I am able to share with others what I am thinking, or what issues I'm facing. And knowing that they pray for me has been a great help. Through this group, my faith and trust in God has grown.

My chief desire is to keep growing more like Jesus every day so that others can see the change he has made in my life.

David Wilson

On the 26th of November 2003, I was taken into hospital with slight discomfort in my chest. The A & E staff did an ECG test and told me to stay in for further tests. At that stage they didn't think it was too serious, but they thought it wise owing to my family history (my Daddy died at 57 and my Mother's brother at 48).

This all took place on the Tuesday; by Thursday I underwent a heart scan, which showed up a severe constriction on the aorta valve in my heart. I was told to stay in bed and not even walk the corridor. I was confined to bed. The Doctor told me I would have to undergo heart surgery to remove and replace the faulty valve. I wasn't going home until this procedure was carried out. You can imagine this was a huge shock to me.

Shortly after hearing this news, I made my Last Will and Testament and as much as I could, made for preparations for all eventualities. But I accepted what had happened and put my trust completely in God whatever the outcome.

Up to that point my faith had consisted of going to Church and praying. I'm nothing special but I knew the basics of Christianity, I accepted that the only one who could rescue me from going down the wrong path and give me new life was Jesus, because of what he did on the cross. I enjoyed my life, and went about simply getting on with business. I'm a great one for a bit of crack and the banter. I was contented with my lot and believed that I was doing what I was supposed to do and that God was looking after me. This was one of the biggest tests I had to face in life.

When I lay in hospital I began to think and pray about these things, this experience had turned my world upside down. I didn't know what was coming next. I was transferred to the Royal Victoria in Belfast. The day before my operation, I was reading and praying to God, even though the situation looked serious, I believe God heard my prayer. I had what I can only describe as a great peace and a sense that God was with me. Inside I was given an inner assurance that my family and the members of the church were praying for my recovery. As strange as it may seem, I knew that God was with me, and I was given confidence that I would survive the operation.

When Marion (my wife) and my Mother came to visit me that day, they were amazed at how calm I was. I told them, there and then, that I felt God's presence with me and I believed that everything would be okay.

The good news is, God kept his promise to me, the operation was successful. God had revealed himself to me in a new and powerful way, at a time when I needed him most. I never forgot what he did for me, I've tried to live my life in a way that pleases him, I know that even though I miss the mark every day, because of what he did for me on the cross I know I am forgiven.

Peter Meenagh

I was brought up into a Christian family and was not a bad chap I would have gone to church, I believed in God and Christ and would pray a good bit, but never thought about making a full commitment to God as I thought I'll be ok I'm a decent enough dude I can get by.

I had a few Christian friends at school and we would chat about Christianity from time to time and exactly what they believed and what I thought. This was good as it got me thinking strongly about life and our actual purpose for being here.

When I finished school I went onto university, a place where I was going to get a whole new lease of life, I made some good new friends in the first couple of weeks and two of my mates were Christians. I would ask them questions which really bugged me like how old the world was and different questions about Bible, but as time went on I found that these questions were being answered with rational thought and a few Ken Ham videos.

My friend brought me to the Christian Union at university one night and then onto a mates house. At my friends house we began talking about Jesus and I started to think deeply about my life, asking myself "why don't I commit to Christ right here what's stopping me really? God loves me and he has helped me through in my times of need. Why shouldn't I follow Him? This really makes sense". So I prayed with my friends and that night I asked Jesus into my life.

When I had put my faith in God I felt an almost immediate eye opening experience to the Bible I could actually understand a lot of the stuff that was unclear before and I had this peace which stayed with me for a couple of days and a sense of freedom and completeness, its hard to describe but it really was amazing.

For me I always had Christ in my life but never took that step to becoming a Christian, I felt I was missing something and all this time it was staring me right in the face all I had to do was walk out and take a step of faith. Looking back I wish I had done it earlier, now my life has a purpose, it's no longer just to live for myself but to live for God and what he wants, and in turn this allows me to help other people. Don't get me wrong I haven't all of a sudden become a person who never sins because no-one is like that we are by nature sinful, no-one is perfect and just like everybody I still face the problems and struggles of life, but to have forgiveness of my sins and to know that God is always there watching over me and guiding me through my life is something which is indescribable.

Through his grace and mercy by giving his son Jesus to die on the cross, God gives us all the chance to grasp the gifts of forgiveness and freedom; this is something everyone can have no matter who they are.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." - John 3:16

Tommy Wallace

AS I stand upon the mountain top,
and look out across the land.
I gaze upon the carpet,
woven by the master's hand.

As through a sunlit glade I walk,
or by a babbling brook.
I can see the Lord's creation,
In all corners that I look.

I went to Sunday School and Church,
and was confirmed as well.
But this isn't just the answer,
to avoid the wrath of Hell

There was no road to Damascus,
no blinding flashing light.
More like the road to Emmaus,
as the Lord slowly revealed his might.

He gently took me in his arms,
and set my feet aright.
He showed me where I'd gone astray,
and how to put things right.

Along life's road he me thus led,
On a path he'd chose with care.
And quietly whispered in my ear,
walk here, No don't walk there.

There are times when life is difficult,
when things are very tough.
When the road is long and stony,
and the going's mighty rough.

But through it all the Lord is there,
like the footsteps in the sand.
As he gently leads and guides me,
on the way to a better land.

For on a hill called Calvary,
nailed to a wooden cross.
The Lord he hung and died there,
that none of us be lost.

The power of prayer is always there,
it can't be done without.
Just lift your eyes to Heaven,
where there's help without a doubt.

So every day lets learn to pray,
to thank the Lord's our call.
Without the help that's in his book,
there's no future here at all.

When I listen to the songbirds,
as they herald in the dawn.
When I see the glowing sunset,
of another day just gone.

I thank you Lord for all I have,
for family and friends.
For health and strength and food to eat,
and blessing without end.

We've all been blessed with little gifts,
to help achieve our tasks.
To serve the Master daily,
sure, its not too much to ask.

So if you are in any doubt,
as to where your future lies.
On bended knee just make a plea,
the Lord will hear your cries.

Thank you for reading this little booklet of ordinary people's stories and what God has done for them.

I know personally, that I found that it has been an encouragement to read these stories, as individuals relate how God is real and active in their lives, giving them the promised 'life in its fullness.'

To live life to the fullest is a lot different than merely existing. In fact, Jesus said that part of His mission was to enable us to live life to the fullest:

"I have come that you may have life, and have it in all its fullness." (John 10:10)

He came so that we could experience life to the full—not according to the standards of a flawed world, but life as it was intended to be. It is life according to the designs and desires of the Creator of life.

By coming to provide for us through his death and resurrection, Jesus has made it possible for us to live a life of joy and hope in a world of despair.

It would be my prayer that as you read these personal experiences of how God is at work in people's lives you will see that what God can do for others, he can do for you also.

May you enjoy reading these stories and may God give you life and life in its fullness.

Rev Isaac Hanna