

LIVES CHANGED BY CHRIST

Introduction

One of the great effects of the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ is that he changes peoples' lives for their good and forever. The Bible speaks of that change in a variety of ways; for example, being brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, being lost and then found, or being dead then alive. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul puts it in this way, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!"*

In this book there is a selection of testimonies of people from various parts of the world who have had their lives changed by Christ. It is our prayer that as you read about the way the Lord Jesus Christ worked in their lives it will help you to see your own need of his life changing love and power.

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Chapter 1 John Featherstone

The Psalmist David wrote about an experience he had been through in a very graphic way in Psalm 40. In the opening verses of that Psalm he speaks of the mercy of the Lord to him like this: *"He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."* The trouble he was in was just like

being down an inescapable hole in the ground. And he goes further, for he tells us the responsibility for this trial he was in was his alone. We read in verse 12, *"For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see."* But in spite of his foolishness, God had mercy on him and rescued him from that pit and placed his feet firmly on solid ground.

Over the centuries since David wrote those words, thousands and thousands of people have identified themselves with the experience David wrote about. And in this opening chapter we are going to learn about someone alive today whose experience was just like David's. His name is John Featherstone, and he lives in Hamilton in the centre of North Island in New Zealand. John is skilled in working with wood and is employed as a joiner. But in tracing John's story we need to go back to his childhood days when he was aged six. It was then that he suffered the first of several traumatic experiences which was to shape his life for many years to come. Sadly, the marriage of John's parents broke apart, and his father walked out of the home and John never knew where his father had gone. As a youngster John was devastated by the split between his parents. Inside he felt not just disappointment, but real hurt. Indeed, as he grew up he would often look at the men who lodged in his mother's boarding house, and longed that one of them would be his father. And the effect this had on him was to make him very inward looking, and suspicious of anyone who tried to get close to him. In fact, it was as if he had built a wall around himself to keep others out. Inside he grew resentful and distrusting of

almost everyone.

This was made even worse by another devastating experience he had to endure. As a young man he fell in love and got married, and it seemed that at last after all those years of loneliness as a child were over. However, that was not to be the case. After several years John's own marriage broke apart and his wife no longer wanted him to live with her. Attempts were made to try and reconcile them, but these all failed and John went through the painful process of a divorce. The damage this caused to John was immense. In fact it made John into a very hostile person, and he even threatened decent people. The loneliness he experienced left an aching void in his life. As time went by John grew more and more bitter and angry as he faced this ordeal on his own. To use the words of David in Psalm 40 he found himself in a very deep and slimy pit, and humanly speaking there was no way out. His anger and bitterness was eating him up inside, and he became someone people did not like, and of whom some were even afraid.

Up to this point in his life God played absolutely no part whatsoever. He never once thought of God, nor of seeking God's help with his difficulties. That did not mean, however, that God had not thought of him. Indeed God had been at work in another member of John's family, because his sister had become a Christian believer. She began to talk with John about the Bible and about the Lord Jesus Christ, and one day she asked him if he would come and hear the word of life. His sister had been attending a Bible study in the home of a Christian couple, and she was

sure that this was where John would find the answer to the tremendous needs he had. She had come to realise that the Bible is the Word of God, and that its message, which had transformed her own life, could transform John's. John did at last agree to go to the Bible study, but not with the intention of learning about the things of God. His purpose was to find contradictions in the Bible which he could use as an argument to say that it was just as empty and meaningless as other people had made him feel.

We might be tempted to think at this point that surely John was going to come under God's solemn judgement for being such a hardened sinner, but in fact the exact opposite was the truth. John was down a deep pit, and in his mercy God had determined to rescue him and bring him out of that pit and transform his life. To John's surprise he could not find any contradictions in the Bible, and the questions he did bring to the Bible study each week were answered by looking at what God had said about them in the Bible. In fact for several years John came each week to that Christian home to study God's Word. At one of these studies John learned about Saul of Tarsus, the man who was once the enemy of Christ and Christians, but who had been wonderfully changed by Christ on the road to Damascus. John immediately identified with the aggressive way Saul once lived, but he still could not see that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who had changed him. Then one day he was reading about Saul again in Acts chapter 9 and it suddenly hit him that it was Christ who changed Saul. As this dawned on him John really began to learn about the Lord in earnest. He had already come to

realise that he deserved to go to hell because of the sin in his life, but as yet he knew nothing of the mercy of God given to those who trust in Christ. As he studied the Bible more a remarkable thing took place in John's life. The wall he had built around himself to keep others out was slowly coming down. In fact, he came to value the Lord Jesus Christ as his best friend, even though he was still not a Christian! Yet still he did not seek the Lord's forgiveness and help in his life.

All this was to change when one day John himself did something very wrong. And when he realised what he had done it absolutely shattered him. He came to see that he had let down his very best friend, Jesus. It felt as if he had kicked Christ in the teeth. And in a moment he realised he was no different from other people. He saw that he was just like the people who had let him down and hurt him in his life. As they had failed and hurt him, so he had failed and hurt the Lord Jesus Christ. Up to this moment of time John had tried several times to ask Christ into his life but never managed to get the words out because of the wall of resistance he had erected around himself. On this day, though, the wall came tumbling down. The resistance melted away and John fell to his knees and cried out to the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive him and to save him from the dreadful pit into which he had fallen. With a broken and contrite heart he pleaded with the Lord for mercy, and in an instant John knew the Lord had heard and answered his request. All the bitterness of those years rolled away. The great burden of sin that he lived under was taken away. The emptiness caused by his sense of isolation just

disappeared, and in its place the Lord came, pouring his love into John's heart and life. It was the very best day of his life. The Lord had lifted him out of the slimy pit he had been in for years, and set his feet on firm ground and placed a song of praise to God in his heart. The forgiveness of sins was no longer simply something he had read about in the Bible and heard others say they enjoyed, for it became his own possession as the grace of God flooded his life. Instead of the anger and bitterness came the peace of God which passes all understanding. The hatred inside him just disappeared. And this was entirely because of the Lord Jesus Christ who had loved John so much that he had died for him on the cross and shed his precious blood that John could be forgiven.

From that day on John became a different person. His life was one that had been changed by Christ in a most remarkable way. The Lord gave John a new family which included his own sister, the family of God's people, the Church of Christ, with many brothers and sisters. Instead of the hatred eating him up and isolating him from people, there came a real loving care and concern for others. The Bible, which he had come to value over the years he had studied it, now became a new book altogether, and to read it was a delight and to obey it was his privilege. Indeed, although he had not done very well at school, the Lord helped him to become a teacher in the Sunday School of his Church. And now John desires to tell everyone he meets what great things the Lord has done for him. He has discovered that whatever wrong we may have done in our past, and whatever distress our behaviour may have

brought to us, if we truly repent of that wrongdoing and place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will forgive us and Christ will change us. John knows this in his own experience, because his is a life that has been changed by Christ.

Chapter 2 Jason Thompkinson

When Jesus was crucified the Bible tells us two other men were executed at the same time. Unlike Jesus who had done nothing wrong, these two men were common criminals, for they were thieves. At first both of these men poured abuse on Jesus (Matthew 27:44). As the hours went by, one of these thieves found the guilt of his wrong behaviour started to penetrate his heart like a knife. He found the way he had disregarded the commands of God throughout his life left him unfit to face God and his judgement. The distress this brought to this man was obvious, because he began to rebuke the other criminal for being so abusive to Jesus. Luke records his words in Luke 23:40: *“Don’t you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”* He realised not only that he had lived his life in the wrong way, but that this meant he was unfit to meet God and give account for the way he had lived. It was an awful experience, and his mind must have been in dreadful turmoil. He had done wrong, and knew he had done wrong, and he knew he would have to answer to God for it all.

Guilt is a terrible thing to live with, because it leads us to

despair. And that despair is intensified when we **realise** our guilt is our own fault. But, surprising as it may seem, this is often the very first step to being made right with God. This thief did not just wallow in his guilt, but realised he needed to be forgiven by God. So he turned to Jesus and asked him for the mercy he required. Wonderfully, the Bible tells us Jesus forgave him instantly, and gave him what must be the most comforting and reassuring promise a dying man can receive. Jesus said to him in Luke 23:43: *“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”* The guilt of his sin had been wiped away, and in an instant his life was changed by Christ.

This similar path has been trodden by many since the day that guilty thief turned to the Lord, and I want to share with you a present day example. Jason Thompkinson is his name, and Jason is a New Zealander, having been brought up in the city of Dunedin in the south of the country. He is married to his wife, Svetlana, whose story is found in the next chapter. Jason has worked hard in his company and is a grocery buyer and manager in a large food store. But we must go back several years to appreciate how his life was changed by Christ. When he left school, like many of the young people he knew, his aim was to work hard to earn money and then to spend that money with his friends. This began with buying a small quantity of alcoholic drink, but it quickly grew until regular visits to the public house and attending night clubs became the norm. Drunkenness became a regular experience for him, and Jason thought this was the way to enjoy life. Even his parents did not think this an unusual way for their son to behave, because

all his friends were doing the same thing, but sometimes they did think he drank a bit too much. As is so often the case when we tolerate sinful behaviour in our lives, one wrongdoing leads on to another. This is exactly what happened to Jason. When he was under the influence of alcohol he began to do other things which it is not good even to talk about. Jason had fallen deeper and deeper into a sinful way of life, just like the thief who died when Jesus was crucified which we mentioned earlier.

It was at this point that Jason found the fun and enjoyment he got from his heavy drinking very quickly evaporated, and in its place came a growing sense of guilt. At the same time he began to wonder what was the purpose of life. Up to that point his goal in life was to earn as much money as he could so that he could continue his weekends of heavy drinking. Although previously he had not felt guilty about the wrong things he was doing, now he began to feel very guilty indeed. The temporary pleasure his sinful behaviour had brought vanished, and in its place came this dreadful awareness that he was guilty and without excuse. One night after a heavy drinking bout, he woke up realising he desperately needed the help of someone to turn his life around. He felt so desperate that he even contemplated suicide as a way out of the mess into which he had got himself. But what he did not realise at the time was that God was at work in his life. It was God who was making him aware of his guilt. It was God who was in control of the situation. God was working in his grace and mercy. This all became evident from what followed. Jason saw an advertisement in a local paper about a course called

‘Developing Christian Character’. Jason thought he saw this by mere chance, but it was no accident at all because God was guiding him to this course. He thought it was something that might help him, because deep in his heart he was searching for an answer to his needs. Through that course he was invited along to church and heard the gospel, the good news about Jesus. Things did not happen overnight because Jason had been brought up as a Roman Catholic and went to a Roman Catholic school, and at that school he was taught many things, but not who Jesus was, nor what the Bible meant and how to apply it to our lives. So there were many questions he needed to have answered. One in particular was, ‘Who is this Lord Jesus?’, because he only used the name of Jesus as a swear word. He remembered asking his grandmother once, ‘Is Jesus God?’, and she said, ‘No, no.’ And so he had many pre-conceived ideas about who the Lord Jesus was and what the Bible, God’s Word, really meant. Thankfully, God was gracious and patient and over a period of quite a few months, things started to happen. He started to read the Bible, and there were so many things he could not understand, but he persisted. This was all because God was preparing his heart and working in his life by the power of his Spirit. There was one illustration from a sermon that really spoke to him. It was about a tribe in another country. In this tribe there was a severe penalty for those who were caught stealing, and theft was frequent in this particular village. The punishment for this crime was something like fifteen or twenty lashes of a whip that only a very strong person could survive. They discovered the culprit who happened

to be the chief's mother. So the chief was put in a difficult predicament because the punishment had to be met. He thought about this, and wondered how he could save his mother. When the day came for the punishment to be inflicted, the chief wrapped his arms around his mother and bore the punishment instead of her. That was when the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ shone into Jason's heart. God spoke personally to him because he realised that was exactly what Jesus had done for him. Jesus, by dying on the cross, had borne the punishment for all his sin of drunkenness and many other things he had done which were wrong. Jesus had suffered so that he could be forgiven. This brought a deep and lasting peace to his heart because of all that Christ had done on the cross. By trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ Jason was forgiven by God, and his whole life was changed around. He was filled with amazement that Christ should have died for him. His guilt was gone, his sin was forgiven, and his heart was filled with peace and love. He knew he was guilty and deserved God's punishment. He knew God could do whatever he wanted to him and be perfectly right in his actions if he punished him. So when Jason realised that he had become God's child because of the Lord Jesus, his whole life was transformed.

Very soon after this, Jason had to face the same sort of trials and difficulties which life brings to all of us. To start with, he stopped going out several nights each week drinking with his friends, but this meant that there was a four-year period when he was by himself, as his friends no longer wanted to be with him. Then, in the early stages,

both his parents and his brother thought he was going mad or had joined some religious cult. Through these challenges he realised he needed to learn more about God and his Word and his keeping power. So he began to study the Bible and learn how those words written so long ago are to be applied to our lives, and how they still are relevant for us. He discovered that the original recipients of the Bible were just like we are today. They did the same wrong things that we do. They had to face the same problems, the same anxieties, and the same fears and worries that we have to face. So it was a great help learning more about God and his Word and about his people. But the greatest blessing that God has given him is the assurance that all his past sins are forgiven, because the Lord Jesus Christ shed his precious blood for him so that his sins could be cleansed from his life. Jason has been changed by Christ, and the Lord has said that for all who confess their sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all we have done. Jason is sure that God, by his grace, has forgiven him.

Chapter 3 Svetlana Thompkinson

In the early verses of John's Gospel in the Bible we are taught that no one becomes a Christian believer simply because they are born in a Christian family or country. John tells us in John 1:12 that we must be born of God. God has to work in our hearts to change us into children of God. A little later on in his Gospel, in chapter 3, we find Jesus saying the same thing to a man named Nicodemus. In verse 7 he said, '*You must be born again*'. And he went on

to explain that this is a change that is produced by the working of his Holy Spirit in a person's life. Now this is a very important lesson to learn, because not one of us can change ourselves so that we become children of God. This is something God has to do for us. Simply because we may belong to Christian parents, that does not automatically make us children of God. We need to be changed by Christ.

It was this lesson that Svetlana Thompkinson learned when she was aged seventeen. Svetlana is married to Jason whose story we told in our previous chapter. She was born in Moldova, which was part of the former Soviet Union, but which is now an independent state. She was born into a big family, and had six brothers and one sister. Something she considers to have been a great privilege was that both her parents were Christian believers. From her earliest days she learned about God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and about the way of salvation. Svetlana has come to realise that it is possible for people to think they are genuine Christians simply because they go to church every Sunday, or have Christian parents. Indeed, we can even think we are not as bad as others who do not go to church. And this is the way she had considered herself for many years. However, to think that way is to deceive ourselves, and God very graciously worked in Svetlana's heart and mind and brought her to see that it was none of these things that make you a child of God. As God began to work in her life, his Holy Spirit convicted her of the wrong she had committed, especially the wrong thoughts that she often had. Svetlana realised she needed to be forgiven by God as

much as any other person, because in God's sight she, too, was a guilty sinner. As this all took place she felt completely unworthy of God, and realised she could not make her own way to God. What she needed was someone else to save her. God then showed her that it was only the Lord Jesus Christ who could bring these changes to her life. It was he who had paid the penalty for her sins, because he was perfect. She knew that because she was imperfect she could never come to God on her own. The Lord brought her to the point where she simply prayed these words, 'God forgive me, and I need Jesus Christ.' It was only a few words, but they came from the depths of her heart, and the Lord heard and answered, and she knew immediately she had been forgiven.

The changes this brought to her life were tremendous, and one in particular stands out. Knowing that she was God's child and had been forgiven by him and that she had been given eternal life, meant she no longer had to be afraid that God would one day punish her for all her sins. She knew that she could come to God, and say that she came in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's own dear Son, and that God would always receive and welcome her. This was of special significance because at that time in her country Christian believers were often persecuted. Pressure was put upon them and life was made difficult by the communist authorities. Svetlana knew that whatever she had to face or endure, she could always come to the Lord for help and strength, and he would welcome her and come to her aid. Although some of the difficulties she had to face were very hard, the Lord preserved her through them

all. Looking back over that time, she told me, ‘The Lord was so great to his faithful servants, and many of our pastors were imprisoned. It was so encouraging to see them coming back and telling how the Lord kept them in their time in prison and through their testimonies how many were converted.’ She added, ‘And those of God’s children who hold to his Word, saw and experienced in their lives that the Lord was true to his promises there for ever.’ And this has become her own experience because her life, too, has been changed by Christ.

Chapter 4 Barry Moul

In our last chapter we referred to a man named Nicodemus who spoke with Jesus. He was one of the religious leaders in Israel at the time called Pharisees, and we read about him in John chapter 3. Nicodemus had a real desire to know God truly and that was why he came to speak with Jesus. He was absolutely certain that God had sent Jesus into the world because he said this in verse 2, *“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”* But like so many people in the world he thought that being a religious leader somehow gave him a special status and favour with God. Indeed, today there are many who are very religious, and who may go to temples and churches all over the world, who think that in some way God has accepted them because of their good deeds. But Nicodemus must have received something of a shock when Jesus told him that is not the way someone is accepted by God and welcomed into his

kingdom. Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be *“born again”*, and without that he would not even see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying, so Jesus explained that this was something the Holy Spirit of God must do in his life. He needed to be made new inside.

In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel the Lord uses another very graphic illustration to describe the change that is needed for a person to become a true child of God. God was addressing the very religious people of Israel who were not true children of God at all. Their religion was only outward show, and they needed a radical change in their hearts. He said this in Ezekiel 36:26-27: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”* In other words, just as Jesus told Nicodemus, God told the people of Ezekiel’s time that they needed to be changed inside, in the very depths of their being. And that is still true today, we need our lives to be changed by Christ.

Someone who has experienced that new birth, that inward change of having a new heart, is Barry Moul. Barry was brought up in the north of England. His father was more interested in football than religion, but his mother was a devout Roman Catholic and went to church regularly. Sadly, his parents’ marriage split apart when Barry was quite young, so he spent most of his early years under the care of his mother. During his school days his mother was careful to send him to a Sunday School so that he could

learn about the Bible and about God. The first Sunday School he attended was run by the Salvation Army. Sadly, the things he learned did not seem very important to him at the time. A little while later the family moved house and their new home was very close to the local Church of England. Barry discovered they had a young people's football team, but to be a member the young people had to attend a class on a Sunday afternoon. So Barry began to attend in order to play football the following Saturday. Very soon he discovered that the minister of the church was more interested in spiritual things than football, and this began to speak to Barry. One day the young people were invited to a large meeting near where they lived. This is how Barry described what took place, "I went along, and I heard a man speaking at this meeting, telling us about the Bible, telling us about God and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and how the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world and he died on a cross. But that wasn't new to me because I'd heard that in Sunday School, either the Salvation Army or the Church of England I'd been going to. But for some reason, it seemed to take a new meaning on when this man was saying it, and I left the meeting sort of thinking, well, I'd like to know more. And one of the men who took us along to the meeting used to help to run the football team and the youth club we used to go along to. About three weeks later he came and spoke to me and said, Barry, the meeting you went to, you were given some literature to read. What did you think about it? Well, to be honest, I don't think I'd read the literature, or hadn't thought about it too much, but we stopped and we discussed it, and he said

to me about the Lord Jesus and did I want to be right with God and know that things were right for the future. And it was shortly after that that I realised that I wasn't right with God and I needed to trust him." As he continued to talk with this Christian man he came to realise that all the religious things he had been doing, including his church attendance, did not make him a true child of God. He came to acknowledge he had done many wrong things and had broken God's commands on many occasions. He needed the Lord to change him on the inside. He needed to have a new heart, a heart that loved God and delighted to follow his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the things he had learned from the Bible he realised he needed to confess to God that he had done wrong, and to tell God he was genuinely sorry. He did this in his bedroom one night as he asked the Lord Jesus Christ to become his Lord and Saviour, and the Lord gave him that new heart and changed him inside. The following Sunday he told his friend at the church that he had become a Christian believer, and although he was very nervous about this he was also very happy.

Since then Barry has trained as a nurse, serving in the Air Force and also in hospitals. He has also married and has two children who have themselves come to seek the Lord to give them new hearts and to change them. Also he has been to Bible college for three years and is now the minister of a small church in the east of England.

I asked Barry as he looked back over his Christian life, what he would say were the outstanding things that God has taught him and helped him with. Firstly, God has

given him a deep concern to tell others about the Lord Jesus, and he delights to do this at every opportunity. He has a real concern that men, women and young people should have their lives changed by Christ just as his has been. The other truth that stands out is that God has been faithful to his Word, the Bible. God promises to be faithful and Barry has found this to be true. I asked him if he could give us one example of this, and he shared this lovely example of God's fulfilment of his promises to provide for our needs. This what he said, "When we went to Bible college we were having to fund our own way. I remember one day we were just going to take the children to school and as we closed the front door, the front lock just disintegrated. The lock just turned round and round. And we thought we'd need to get a new lock. We had no money to buy a new lock for the front door, so we put the chain on and we put a bolt on and went out the back door. We took the children to school and we came back, and there was an envelope the postman had brought and we opened the envelope and there was a ten pound note inside. It may not mean much to many people, but to us that was God providing for us in a very special way. And that's only one of many illustrations that we could give you of how God has provided for us. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and if God is the Creator of this world, then God can provide a ten pound note to buy a lock for the door."

In all of this it is the Bible that has most helped Barry. Each morning he tries to find a time when he can be alone with God to read the Bible and to pray. He asks God to

speak to him through his Word, and God has done just that. God has revealed things to him through the Bible that he had not noticed before. God has spoken to him through the Bible and that has helped him to grow spiritually. Linked with that is the importance of fellowship with other people of like mind, other Christians who can share their experiences, their good points, and their bad points, the highs and the lows. Encouragement from other Christians has helped him to grow.

Chapter 5 Dr Richard Luxton

So far the examples of lives changed by Christ that we have looked at have concentrated on the conversion experience of those mentioned. That, of course, is absolutely important, but we need to be careful not to think that once someone has become a Christian believer that there are no more changes to be made. The Bible teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ continues to work in our lives and is constantly changing us and bringing our lives into conformity with the teaching of the Bible. There is an ongoing process, if you like. The Bible speaks of it in a number of ways. For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:16 we read, "*...inwardly we are being renewed day by day*". In Colossians 3:10 the Christian believer is urged to "*...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*". So having begun to change the sinner at conversion, the Lord Jesus Christ continues to work in the believer's life and is continually changing him so that he becomes more and more like the Saviour himself.

Dr Richard Luxton is a very good example of this. Richard is a senior lecturer in clinical biochemistry at the University of the West of England in Bristol. He is also doing research into the early diagnosis of diseases, which includes subjects such as immunology. He completed his doctorate at the Institute of Neurology in London which is part of the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, where he was looking for particular types of antibodies in the brains or the central nervous system of patients with Multiple Sclerosis.

The Lord Jesus Christ began his changing work in Richard's life when he was in his teenage years. Richard did not come from a Christian family, but as a young man he joined a young people's organisation known as the scouts. This movement was started by Lord Baden-Powell in the early part of the 20th century, and now it is a world-wide organisation. It was through the scouts that Richard was first introduced to the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ, because it was a requirement that he should attend church parade. In addition the scout promise included the words, 'I believe in God'. At the same time each day school began with an assembly of the whole school where Christian hymns were sung, the Bible read and there was a short talk about the reading. While many of Richard's friends thought very little of these things, Richard was different. The Lord was at work in his life and he began to be really interested in the Bible's message. Then through the influence of a friend he heard an evangelist called Dick Saunders. As this man explained that Jesus had died on the cross for the forgiveness of sinners, Richard was brought

to the point of committing his life to Christ as his Saviour and Lord. This was the beginning of many changes the Lord made in Richard over many years.

Shortly after this first change he went through a time where he felt something was not quite right with his Christian profession. It was as if there was something missing, but he did not know what that was. Along with some other young people he went to a church when the message from the Bible was about baptism. Here he learned that each believer is to show genuine discipleship of Christ by being baptised. This was to be a public declaration of trust in the Saviour. Initially, Richard resisted this and did not want to submit to the Lord's command, but the Lord continued to speak to him about it. Gradually, Richard realised it was obedience to this command to be baptised that was missing in his life. The Lord Jesus Christ produced another change in his life from being unwilling to be baptised to willingly obeying this simple command, and Richard was baptised. As he obeyed the Lord, so the Lord's peace and assurance filled his heart.

The next change came when Richard had to give something up to show that Christ came first in his life. Richard had a great interest in the history of wars, and he used to re-enact famous battles using small figures of soldiers dressed in their various uniforms. Now there was nothing wrong or sinful about this interest in itself, but a time came when there was the danger of it taking first place in his life. This came to a head when the friends he used to share this activity with wanted to do it on a Sunday when Richard would have normally been in the church

service. So the issue was what would Richard put first – his interest in war games or the worship of God? The Lord brought him under the conviction that to put anything before his Saviour, even something that might be good, was wrong. And through the Lord's grace working in his life, he gave up his war games because he knew the Lord should have first place in his life above everything else. So that was a further change Christ produced in his life.

Another issue he had to grapple with as a young scientist was the subject of creation and evolution. Both at school and at university evolution was presented to him as a fact, whereas it is only a theory. Having read the Bible's teaching about creation, it was obvious he could not believe in both creation and evolution. It had to be one or the other. Just at that time the leader of the young people's group in Richard's church was an engineer named Dr Brian Stone, who was also a lecturer at Bristol University. He had given considerable study to the creation-evolution issue and helped Richard immensely. For the first time he began to see that evolution was not as certain as most people claim. At first he wondered if each of the six days of creation in Genesis chapter 1 referred to a long period, perhaps one day equalling one million years, but he soon realised that is not what God had revealed in the Bible. As the Lord helped Richard to study this issue in the Bible, he came to a clear understanding that God was indeed the Creator, and evolution was not true. This conviction has deepened as his own academic career has developed, and all the research he has been involved in has never once suggested to him that evolution is true. This has reinforced

his appreciation that the Bible, the Word of God, is absolutely true. Making this stand as a Christian has not been easy, and frequently he has suffered the abuse of others who have taken the opposite view. However, the Lord has helped him remain true to the Bible in spite of this opposition.

The Lord Jesus Christ has performed all these changes in Richard's life, and he continues to do so.

Chapter 6 Cecil Bassett

In the Old Testament book of Psalms in the Bible there is an interesting verse in Psalm 34. David wrote this Psalm in which he tells us about the wonderful way the Lord helped him, answering his prayers and saving him from all his troubles. Such was his awareness of the Lord's goodness that he wanted others to experience his blessing in their own lives. It is with that in mind that he wrote the verse I referred to just now. Verse 8 reads, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*" It is interesting because it tells us a very important truth. If we are to enjoy the goodness of God in our own lives, then we have to trust him ourselves. We have to '*...taste and see...*' David is using a very graphic picture for us. Just as the only way to know how good food is, is to taste it ourselves, so it is with the Lord and his goodness, we can only enjoy him by turning to him and trusting our lives into his loving care.

And it was this need to trust in Christ personally that resulted in the life of a man named Cecil Bassett being changed by Christ. Although Cecil's family were not

Christian believers, they none-the-less encouraged him to attend a church and to learn about the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ. For 17 years this continued but with no real change in Cecil at all. Although he knew a lot about God, he could not say that he knew the Lord personally. In his head he had a great deal of knowledge, but had no experience of God in his heart.

Sadly, his Bible Class teacher died, and was replaced by a man from a neighbouring church. One day he invited Cecil to a large meeting in London's Albert Hall to hear a Christian Male Voice Choir. There were about one thousand men in the choir, and the lives of every one of them had been changed by Christ. They each knew him as their Saviour and Lord, and enjoyed the goodness of his forgiveness and love. As Cecil listened to these men sing about the Lord Jesus Christ, it was obvious to him that these men had something he lacked. They really did know the Lord in a personal way as their Friend, and he longed to know Christ in the same way. In fact, as he journeyed home he was very troubled over this great lack in his life. Linked with this was the fact that he also knew he was not ready to meet God because of his sin. He felt absolutely lost, and was convinced that if he had died then he would not have gone to heaven but to hell. He realised in a way he had never known before that he was a sinner and therefore under God's condemnation. His mind kept going back to this for several days, and increasingly Cecil knew he needed his life to be changed by Christ. Like David in Psalm 34 he needed to taste and see for himself that the Lord is good. But Cecil did not know how to pray. He had

never really prayed before and yet knew he needed to call on the Lord to have mercy on him. It was then that he remembered a little song that he had learned in his childhood. The words went like this, *'Into my heart, come into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today, take sin away, come into my heart, Lord Jesus.'* He had sung those words many, many times as a child, but that night he really meant it as he used them humbly to ask the Lord to forgive him and to change his life. It was a personal cry, because he realised that the Christ who died on the cross for sinners was the very one he needed in his own life. He had for the first time tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and immediately he knew the Lord had heard his prayer.

This brought many changes to him. For the first time in his life he enjoyed real peace within, peace with God, because the Lord had forgiven his sins. He found his former sinful habits began to disappear. He found going to church to meet with other Christian believers and to hear the Word of God explained, was no longer a duty but a delight that he looked forward to each week. As he developed as a Christian he found that his conscience had become sensitive to sin in a way he had never experienced before, and this increasingly helped to recognise the difference between right and wrong, so that he could live in the right way. He found that the Bible had become a different book for him. When he had read it before, it did not mean very much to him, but now it came to life and God spoke to him as he read the words. He found the Bible to be so relevant to his own life, and he had a real hunger to know more

about the Lord. It was a remarkable change that the Lord Jesus Christ had performed in his life. Cecil had indeed tasted and seen that the Lord is good. And what is so remarkable is that all who turn to the Lord in the same way will find him to be good to them. The question is, have you turned to him and tasted his goodness for yourself?

Chapter 7 Susan Snowball

In the first book of Samuel in the Old Testament we have the description of how Samuel himself came to know the Lord personally. What is interesting about the details is that Samuel knew about God and even about serving God before he came to know him. His mother, Hannah, had been childless, and so she prayed earnestly to God about this matter. The Lord granted her request and gave her and her husband, Elkanah, their son, Samuel. In gratitude to the Lord, when Samuel was old enough, Hannah gave him back to God, so he went to live in the house of the Lord in Shiloh. There he was involved in the activities associated with the worship of God and served alongside the priest Eli. So we can see that Samuel did know about God and also about the service of God. This went on for some time but still Samuel did not know God personally. However, one night the Lord called Samuel and he could hear the voice very clearly. Samuel automatically thought it was Eli who was calling him so went straight to him to ask what he wanted. Eli denied calling him and sent Samuel back to bed. Again God called to Samuel, and again he went to Eli, who assured him he had not called his name, and sent him back to bed yet again. It is at that point that

we read these words in 1 Samuel 3:7: “*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*” So although he knew about God and attended the various meetings in the house of God, any personal relationship with God was absent from Samuel’s life. A third time the Lord called him, and this time when he went to Eli the old priest realised it was God who was calling him. God was entering into that personal relationship with Samuel. So this time Eli told him to go and lie down again, and when he heard God calling his name again to answer, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*” From that time onwards Samuel knew God in that close and intimate way that is the privilege of the true people of God. It was a life-changing experience which the Lord gave Samuel.

Now you may be wondering why we have started this chapter in this particular way. The experience of Samuel has been mirrored in the lives of many people. There are those who from their earliest childhood have been taught about God and the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ, but they do not know God in that personal way. A good example of this is the spiritual experience of Susan Snowball, who lives in Auckland in New Zealand. Susan was born into a Christian family, and her parents were members of a Presbyterian Church. So from her earliest days she had been taught about the things of God, and how he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners. As she learned about these things she never once doubted that they were true, and she knew that God was real. However, she still did not have a personal

relationship with the Lord, and indeed never really thought of the Lord in that way. She simply accepted that God and Jesus were real, but that was all. She was just like Samuel that we mentioned earlier.

Mercifully, the Lord not only knew about this lack in Susan's life, but wanted to remedy it, and he did so by speaking to her, not with an audible voice as was Samuel's experience, but through hearing a message from the Bible. When she was aged fifteen she went to a camp run by a Christian organisation for young people called Open Air Campaigners. The good news about Jesus was presented to all the young people as the Bible was explained to them, and reference was made to his death on the cross and his resurrection. As she listened for the first time in her life she was made aware of her own sinfulness. For the first time she came to realise she had actually been guilty of disobeying God and doing wrong things, and this disturbed her greatly. One Bible passage spoke to her very powerfully. It was Genesis 39 where she read about Joseph who was tempted to immoral behaviour by the wife of his master, Potiphar. Joseph resisted the temptation firmly, but as she listened Susan began to ask herself what she would have done if she was in a similar situation. In a most disturbing way she realised probably she would have given in to the temptation. It was this which made her realise that in the eyes of God who is holy, she was a sinner. The Lord was speaking to her very clearly and she realised that she was not a Christian believer at all. She had gone to church all those years and knew about the Lord Jesus Christ, but had never trusted him for herself. She had

been relying on the fact that her parents were believers, and now the Lord was showing her that was not enough. He was challenging her to commit her own life to him, to seek his forgiveness for her own sins, because she had never done that before. So she responded to him in a positive way, asking the Lord to be merciful to her and become her Lord and Saviour. Immediately, she was filled with the awareness that the Lord had pardoned her, and that because of the shed blood of Christ he had actually forgiven her for her sins. It was the biggest change she had ever experienced in her life because she actually came to know him personally, instead of just knowing about him. As we said earlier, it was just like Samuel's experience of God.

The next few years that followed were wonderful. She just loved to spend time reading the Bible and praying to the Lord, and there grew in her heart a desire to give her life in service to God. It was then that God taught her another lesson which was to be a further change in her life. Because she was so grateful to the Lord for his forgiveness and mercy she was genuinely zealous to serve him, but she made what is an easy mistake to make. Because she wanted to do so much for the Lord she decided where she was going to serve him without really seeking his guidance in the matter. She decided she would become a Bible translator and travel overseas to where the people did not have a Bible in their own language. Her desire was very commendable, but she had never asked God if this was what he wanted her to do. The Lord had to teach her the important lesson that we must submit humbly to his will for our lives, and not go our own way, however

commendable our desires might be. She went to university to study English, and also decided to study Japanese to improve her translation skills. Within a year she realised she had made a mistake. Her studies in Japanese were incredibly difficult, and although she just managed to pass her exams she realised God had not given her a gift in languages. She realised she was just so enthusiastic to do things for God that she was not really listening to him. And the Lord taught her the importance of humility and submission to his will for her life, and not to go her own way. In fact, the Lord had work for her to do at home. She became more involved in her local church, was baptised and has had many opportunities to tell unbelievers about the goodness of the Lord to her. She looks back on that time with thankfulness for the Lord's goodness to her.

There is one further change the Lord performed in Susan's life that was very similar to that of Samuel and his mother Hannah that we mentioned earlier. Susan eventually got married. However, Susan and her husband experienced considerable difficulty in having a child. Over nine years went by, and still they were childless. At first they were not too discouraged, but as time went by they discovered it mattered to them very much indeed and became a real burden. Much prayer was made and many tears shed, and the difficulty was increased because there were many couples in their church who were having new babies. For Susan it was one of the hardest times in her whole life. But then the Lord overruled to change things, and he used a very sad situation to give Susan his encouragement. The sad thing was that there were a number of problems in the

church Susan attended, and the marriages of two couples were breaking apart. Because of the seriousness of this developing situation the church had a special prayer meeting one Sunday morning. Susan was present and before the prayer time the pastor read out the story of Hannah who prayed that she might have a child, and then he asked everyone present to pray like Hannah. The pastor went on to remind them of how great God is and how he is able to answer the believing prayers of his people whatever difficulties we may be facing, even things which may be humanly impossible. As Susan listened she knew that the Lord was speaking to her about the childlessness she herself was experiencing. Suddenly she felt tears rushing down her cheeks, and she prayed again, and in that same week she found out she was pregnant. The Lord had changed things for her and gave her a lovely daughter. Even though this was a hard ordeal to go through Susan discovered the Lord was using it to help her in a number of ways. For example, God taught her that sometimes we have to be patient and to wait and to persevere in prayer. It was in effect a real test of her faith and a means of strengthening her trust in the Lord. Through this trial she realised she constantly needed to remember that the Lord is a loving God, who cares about every detail in our lives. Added to this, she has seen the importance of thanking and praising God for his goodness. Susan and her husband are profoundly aware that their daughter, Allissa, is God's gift to them. She has brought them much joy from the day she was born and it was all the Lord's doing.

Chapter 8 John Malcolm

It is an interesting study in itself to see the widely different ways that God uses to bring men and women to trust truly in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Testament book of Acts there are two examples of what I mean in chapter 16. There we learn how two different people came to know Christ's changing power in their lives by quite different means, and the difference was a very wide one.

First we read of lady called Lydia. She was a wealthy business woman who traded in purple cloth, which was highly sought after by the upper classes of Roman society. Lydia was a spiritually-minded person who already believed in God when she is first introduced to us. We know this because she met with others by the river bank to pray, and we are specifically told in verse 14 that she was a worshipper of God. Although she believed in God she did not know his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so God sent Paul to tell her about the Saviour. As she listened to the good news about Jesus, and how faith in him brings us God's complete forgiveness a wonderful thing happened. We read in Acts 16:14, "*The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*" It is a lovely description of a very quiet and peaceful experience, just like a flower bud that has pushed its way through the ground and then opens silently as the warmth of the sun's rays fall upon it. As Lydia heard about the love of God, the Lord opened her heart and she came to trust in his Son. It was a wonderful experience.

The second person in Acts 16 who also came to know Christ's changing power in his life was an entirely different

character altogether. He was the jailor of the Roman prison in the same town of Philippi in which Lydia lived. These jailers were usually very unpleasant characters who were very coarse and rough individuals. Paul had been arrested for teaching about Jesus and he and his companion, Silas, had been imprisoned. The jailer secured them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. He seemed to have little thought for God's servants or for God himself. But the Lord was going to change this man's life within hours. It was obvious that knowing that Paul and Silas were Christian believers and the Lord's servants had very little effect on this man, so God used something that literally shook his whole being. At midnight, while Paul and Silas were singing the Lord's praises in their prison cell, the Lord caused the whole prison to be violently shaken by an earthquake. The jailer was terrified, fearing that all the prisoners had escaped, which meant he was in very serious trouble with the Roman authorities. In fact, he was so alarmed at what might happen to him that he drew out his sword to commit suicide! However, Paul called to him to stop and assured him none of the prisoners had escaped. The jailer came to him trembling, and asking what he must do to be saved. The earthquake made him realise how frail he really was, and that if he had died then he would not have been ready to face God. He suddenly realised all that Paul and Silas taught about the Lord Jesus Christ was true, and so he asked how he could be forgiven. The reply he received was, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.*" This he did and his life was changed by Christ from that

very moment.

So there we have two widely different ways that God used to bring Lydia and the jailer to enjoy the changing power and love of Christ in their lives. It is the second of these ways that applies to our next present day example of a life changed by Christ, and his name is John Malcolm. It quite literally took a life-shattering experience to make him seriously realise his own need of the Lord to change him.

John is a lecturer in photography. Although he comes from New Zealand he has travelled quite widely, including a ten-year spell teaching in the United Kingdom and a time of spiritual searching in India. To appreciate how the Lord dealt with him we need to go back to his boyhood days. His parents sent him to a Sunday school and when he was aged thirteen he was confirmed in his local church. However, shortly afterwards he came to realise that he was not a believer at all, and in fact he rejected Christianity altogether. But deep inside he was aware of what he described as a God-shaped hole in his heart. He did not believe in God at this time and so began to search for other things to fill the vacuum he was aware of in his life. This search led him to try eastern mysticism, also a form of yoga, and he even went to India searching for an answer to the meaning of life. Eventually he ended up in Switzerland, working in a hotel quite illegally. This was in a town called Le Plazu in the Jura mountains. Soon the police caught up with him and he was escorted to the border and ejected from the country. Just as he left a Christian girl who worked at the hotel gave him a book which she said he needed to read. The book was called

‘The God Who Is There’, written by a Christian philosopher called Francis Schaeffer, who lived and work in L’Abri. So John travelled to France and started reading the book. He became intrigued because, as he read, he realised that Christianity had never been presented to him in a realistic way. It had been dressed up in rituals and institutions, and never challenged him as an individual. As he read through the book this challenge from God had a profound effect on him so he decided that he ought to go and meet the writer, Francis Schaeffer. He travelled back into Switzerland by another border, and spent some time at L’Abri, where he met Francis Schaeffer and studied there for a couple of months. Francis Schaeffer had been given a particular ministry by God to help those who, like John, had difficulties in reconciling the world in terms of politics, arts, music and so on, with Christian beliefs. He helped John to see that following Christ was profoundly relevant to the world we live in and the complex issues we sometimes have to face. He re-presented Christianity to John in a way which spoke to him in his search for spiritual reality. Nothing else that he had tried satisfied his need at all, because none of these religions dealt with the essential issues of his own guilt. They did not deal with his knowledge of sin. They did not deal with the fact that eventually John was going to be accountable to God for who he was and what he had done, whereas he began to see that following Christ did have the answers to these crucial issues. He was convinced in his mind that Christianity was real and true, and it was the only way in which there was going to be a valid world view that would actually answer

every aspect of his life. For example, such questions as to how he related to other people, how he dealt with other people's tragedies, their joys, their sins, how he dealt with his own sin, and how he could respond to them. He was convinced intellectually that the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ was true, but one thing was still lacking. All this searching had still not brought him face to face with the living Jesus Christ. John had still not become a Christian believer.

Well, this was about to change quite dramatically. God used an accident that could have killed John to make him realise his need of a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. One of John's hobbies was hang-gliding. A hang-glider is a piece of equipment that enables the person using it to glide through the air and experience flying without an engine. It is a portable apparatus with a light framework, and the flier quite literally hangs beneath the wings which are made from fabric. The pilot launches his glider by running off the edge of a cliff and then using the air currents to glide and eventually come safely down to land. John was flying one day while in Switzerland, but instead of landing safely he crashed into some high voltage electrical power lines, and became suspended between two of them. If he touched the cables the power was sufficient to kill him instantly and would probably fry his body in the process! Amazingly, his collision caused the main fuses in the electrical substations to blow, and his life was spared. It was this accident that God used to bring John face to face with his own mortality. Although he had this head-knowledge that Christianity was real, valid and true, it had

not become true for him as an individual. He realised that he could have died, and he knew that if so he would not have been ready and would not have ended up in heaven but in hell. He described it like this, "*I would have not asked for forgiveness for my own sins; I would not have entered into a liaison with Christ. So that was a wake-up call for me, and it sounds dramatic looking back on it, but you know, I look now and I say, well, God was dealing with me actually very gently. I wasn't injured and it certainly looked dramatic, that's for sure!*" After hanging in the air for quite some time, eventually ladders were brought and he reached the ground safely.

It was this accident that made him realise he needed to get down on his knees, admit that God is holy while he was a sinner, and to ask the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Just like the jailer at Philippi we mentioned earlier, it took this life-shattering experience to bring John to his senses so that he called on the name of the Lord for mercy. And the Lord answered his prayer. He pardoned him for the years when he had lived without God and had rebelled against God. Christ changed his life and brought him the assurance that he had become a true child of God. It was the great turning point in his life. Looking back he could see that God had actually been working in his life over a long period of time, and at every point he had been resisting him. At every point he had not wanted to accept him. But now there was a momentous change, because his resistance which made him run away from God disappeared, and in its place he started to run towards God. It was a complete turn around because Christ changed his

life, brought him into a living relationship with God, and filled him with joy and peace.

Chapter 9 Laura Higham

One of the dangers the Bible takes great care to warn us about, is the activity of the devil, the great enemy of God and men. For example, Jesus called him *'the father of lies'* in John 8, while John described him as *'the accuser of the brethren'* in 1 John 2. Then Paul wrote of him as *'the one with cunning schemes'* in 2 Corinthians 2 verse 11, and Matthew called him *'the tempter'* in Matthew 4. From these verses we can understand why we need to be on our guard against him. Wonderfully, the Bible also tells us that although the devil is such a malicious being, the Lord Jesus Christ has defeated him and triumphed over him. We see this in the Gospels where we have the record of the devil, or Satan as he is also known, tempting Jesus himself. On each occasion Jesus resisted his temptations and overcame them. In Hebrews 2:14-15 we are told that Jesus became a man in order to defeat the devil. *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."* Then we are told by the apostle John in 1 John 3:8, *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."*

It is the devil's deceitfulness and cunning, and how the Lord Jesus Christ overcame that in the life of Laura Higham that this chapter is about. Laura's life has been wonderfully transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ, but for

many years before that change took place, she had been deceived and lured astray by the devil. Interestingly, she still believed in God, but that belief was rather superstitious instead of real trust. It was a selfish belief where she believed God was there if she needed him, but at other times she forgot about him. It was superstition that ruled her life and she became heavily involved in occult activities. At that time these evil practices excited her, especially as she thought they could tell her the future. And so it was that she was unwittingly drawn into these wrong practices by the deceitfulness of the devil. She was involved in horoscopes, tarot cards, spiritism, and contacting the dead, even though God has forbidden these things in the Bible. (See Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Leviticus 19:31; Revelation 21:8.) She even practised a form of spiritism in which she prayed to God first for his protection, even though these things were abhorrent to him! At first she considered these things as fun, but before long she realised they were much more sinister than that as they began to control her life. The fun disappeared and she became fearful and frightened.

About this time her friend came to know the life-changing love and power of Christ in her life and became his follower. She began to pray for Laura and even told her that what she was doing was dangerous. Laura tried to shrug this off by telling her friend not to be so silly, but deep down she was afraid. The devil had cunningly ensnared her and she did not realise what had happened. She felt trapped and could not find a way out. This even began to show physically as friends could tell there was

something wrong because she looked so terrible. What is important to note is that she got involved in this evil activity without ever realising it was dangerous until it was too late. The devil delights to deceive people in this way by offering them fun and excitement, but in reality only bringing them misery and pain. When Laura was a teenager there was an occult explosion where she lived and this fascinated her, and it continued to have a hold on her life until she was aged twenty nine.

Throughout this period her friend, who had become a Christian, continued to pray for Laura and to talk to her about the love and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. One day she invited Laura to a meal to be held in her church after which there would be a speaker. At first Laura refused the invitation, but then realised that she was refusing her best friend, and so she decided to attend. The thing that struck her immediately was the warmth of the welcome she received from these Christian believers who made her feel so at home. Everybody was friendly, the meal was very good, and the speaker's talk really spoke to her. He was speaking about sin, and although she did not fully understand all that was being said, she felt very uncomfortable. He told the people listening to go home and read their Bibles so that they could see what God has to say about sin. Just two weeks prior to this event Laura had been cleaning at home and had found a Bible she had been given from a youth club she used to attend years before. It was just at the right time. Although she did not appreciate it at the time, the Lord was at work in all of these circumstances. As soon as she got home from the

meal she began to read her Bible, and even though she did not understand it very well she knew it was the right thing to do. On the day that she found the Bible she also discovered a prayer book with these words in it, '*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*' These are the words of Jesus found in Matthew 11:28, and Laura kept wondering what they meant and who was weary and burdened, and what was the rest. It puzzled her. Her Christian friend then asked her to the meetings the believers held on Sundays. Although at first she refused, as the meeting was about 15 km away, she did go. Remarkably, although it was a new experience with new people, there was a wonderful feeling of love that was the exact opposite to the fear she had been experiencing. This was the very thing she had been longing for but which had eluded her in her occult activities. She realised she had no need to become involved in spiritism any more, nor attend a spiritualist church which had been a real possibility. These Christian believers had something infinitely better than she had ever found elsewhere: they had the love of Christ in their hearts. As she began to talk with the pastor about her spiritual needs, one of these new friends loaned her a book about a man named John Newton. He had become a Christian even though he had done terrible things as a slave trader. This made Laura realise that even though she had done some terrible things herself, she was not beyond the Lord's mercy to forgive and change her. As she continued to read the Bible and a book entitled, 'What Jesus Taught', she began to understand that Jesus had died on the cross so that the bad things she had done could be

forgiven. She knew she could not change herself. The realisation that Jesus, who was God's Son and never did anything wrong, would die for somebody like her and give her the opportunity to have a new life was wonderful, and yet it made her feel so terrible because she knew how bad she had been. Indeed, the more she understood about the love of Christ the more weighed down she felt about her own guilt. It was then she realised this was what Jesus meant when he spoke about the weary and burdened. It was about our load of guilt. And she knew that there was only one way to have this guilt and weight removed and that was to ask Jesus to forgive her. So she knelt down in tears knowing how much he loved her and how much she had hurt him, and she sought his forgiveness. Immediately, she felt a new person. She knew she had been forgiven. The Lord Jesus Christ had changed her life, cleansing away all her sin, removing the fear and terror her former way of life had brought, and she was filled with his love and peace. All the horoscopes she had collected and had kept in her fear were thrown away, as she realised she did not need them any more. Her life was safe and secure in the hands of Almighty God who had become her heavenly Father. The former gloom and despair that she suffered so regularly disappeared, and in its place came the joy of the Lord. Through further reading of her Bible she saw the need to obey the Saviour by being baptised and being committed to the people of God in church membership. When she has faced difficulties since being first changed by Christ, she has not had to face any of them alone, as previously. The Lord has been with her; she has been able

to pray to him about everything, and he has upheld and sustained her.

What a marvellous difference the Lord Jesus Christ has made in Laura's life after all those years of being deceived by the devil. And it is only the Lord Jesus Christ who is able to give new life and hope and peace to men and women, young and old, who call on him for the forgiveness of their sins. The great question is have you called on him yet? Have you been changed by him yet? Perhaps, like Laura, you have searched for meaning and purpose in life, but have been looking in the wrong place. Like Laura, you may have even been involved in occult activity and today live in fear and despair. Then do not delay any longer. A life that has been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ is a life that belongs to God. It comes under his special loving care and control, and has the assurance that at the end there is a secure future in heaven. Whatever dreadful, evil and wrong things you may have committed, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, is able to cleanse all that sin away, and this he does gladly for those who seek him humbly for it.

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