

My Testimony by Clive Richardson

I gave my heart to the Lord in the late 1950's at the Elim Tabernacle in Graham Street, in the jewellery quarter of Birmingham, at a time when they were enjoying the pastoral care and ministry of Pastor John Dyke, an ex Welsh miner. He was a lovely man, and full of the Holy Spirit. When He walked into a meeting it was as if the Holy Spirit walked in with Him. The whole atmosphere changed.

Not long after I got saved, and still attending that church I was baptised in water, and after one of the Sunday evening meetings, I attended what they called a 'waiting meeting' for the purpose of seeking God for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Pastor John Dyke led the meeting and encouraged us all to ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit, and then to praise and worship, but also to breathe in deeply. I was wonderfully filled with the Holy Spirit that night. It was an experience I didn't expect and one I'll never forget.

I believe when we seek God, he often has a way of dealing with us in ways we don't expect.

After that wonderful experience, time and time again I tried to get it back again. I would praise and worship like there was no tomorrow, and I would breathe deeply until I hyperventilated, but it didn't work. No matter how hard I tried I couldn't get back what I experienced in that 'waiting meeting'.

I spent years in this state until I related the problem to someone, who enlightened me by saying, "Stop looking for the experience. Look for Him."

And I thought I was looking for Him, but in my Christian immaturity I was asking for Him to reassure me on my terms.

And you know I wasn't reading His word daily, or even weekly. I hardly ever spent time with Him devotionally, yet I expected Him to reassure me, but I wanted that reassurance on my terms.

I didn't realise that I was identifying with the children of Israel in the wilderness when they complained about the barren land they were in, and what the Pharisees did when they antagonised Jesus in seeking a sign. In some cases it was intended to antagonise, and perhaps in others it was based upon doubt. Either way, testing God.

How on earth was I expecting God to reward that?

Since his advent on earth, by enlarge man has chosen to keep God out of the picture, organising his own affairs in his own wisdom, or what he thinks is wisdom. And yet he expects that God should jump in and save when things go wrong.

A common question people ask is, "If God's a God of Love, why does He allow this or that to happen?" But in chapter 1:19 Paul quotes Isaiah where God says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

The relationship between God and us needed to be complete from the beginning, as individuals, as nations, and as a world, where His wisdom was always respected as being infinitely superior to ours.

In my earlier Christian experience I made the mistake of keeping God at a distance, continuing in my self-seeking lifestyle, which went from bad to worse, culminating in my first marriage ending in disaster.

We attended church regularly but on my part it was all a show, all a facade.

Behind the scenes I was anything but what people could see on the outside. Basically I was doing my own thing, and God wasn't getting a look in. The relationship wasn't there.

And yet God, in His love and patience, hasn't let me go. On more than one occasion, and at least once when I was in a backslidden state, the Lord visited me personally and gave me some wonderful experiences in Him.

But it was always when I was either dropping off to sleep, or becoming vividly aware while asleep, or by being awakened.

One occasion while I was in back-slidden state, drinking every night, and going out to the pub most evenings, I was awakened from sleep in the early hours. First it was as if I'd suddenly become vividly aware before I'd opened my eyes, and I could hear loud banging all around me.

I sensed I was in the middle of a round room with many doors all around. At first I imagined whatever was beyond the doors was trying to get at me, perhaps some kind of evil entity. I remember shouting out in fear, "Who is it?". The banging stopped, and a voice seemingly from the other side of the doors simply said, "Jesus Christ." I knew I wasn't ready for Him and cried out and awoke.

I got up to go to the bathroom, and as I stood there I noticed the top half of an old calendar, you know, one of these enamelled tin things. It was on the shelf behind the toilet, propped up against the wall. I'd never taken any notice of it before, even though it had probably been there a long time. But this time I really noticed it, because what was on it leaped out at me. It was the well known "Light of the world" picture, and the caption at the bottom was, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." You can imagine the effect this had on me.

Another time, and I can't remember whether it preceded the experience I've just related to you, but again I became vividly aware in the middle of the early hours. I knew I was lying on my right side, and I opened my eyes and saw a figure standing at the side of the bed. I sensed it was a male figure which was silhouetted by a strong light coming from behind it. It seemed whoever it was, was wearing some kind of helmet, domed at the top and the sides coming straight down to the shoulders. The possibility of some kind of alien being crossed my mind, but before I could get around to being scared a right hand closed over my right hand. As soon as it did so I knew who it was. The love seemed to penetrate into my hand and arm. I tried to feel for the marks but I can't remember the outcome of that, but I do remember making a grab for his arm with my left hand, intending to hold on to him. Then something very strange happened. Someone touched the back of my neck which caused me to let go. I turned over onto my left side a few moments later, and a voice spoke into my mind, not to fear and that it was Him, Jesus.

Later I thought about the experience and one thing that rules out auto-suggestion is that at first I thought it was an alien wearing some kind of helmet, all silhouetted by a light coming from behind him. Of course, it was his hair, not a helmet, and the light I assume to be the light coming from His Father.

Yet another time, again I was lying down about to drop off to sleep, lying on my left side. Someone started to speak in tongues audibly in my right ear. I don't know why but immediately I opened my mouth to do the same, speak in tongues, but no sound came out. Instead I was filled from head to toe with the power of the Holy Spirit. Could it be a dream I thought, so I tested out the situation, and soon realised I wasn't asleep, but awake and looking at the amber street lights lighting up the net curtains. I lay there for some considerable time, my whole body held in the powerful grip of this wonderful infilling.

So it seems perhaps that it was when I was dead to the world were the only times He could get through the "on my terms" barrier.

These wonderful encounters and experiences were on His terms, not mine.

But just a few years ago I finally came to a kind of wit's end corner.

I found myself walking over Gentshew Common, near to where I live in Burntwood, talking to God like never before. It was as if I was placing all my self-driven life on a table between Him and me.

He and I could plainly see the path of destruction my life had laid in it's wake. I admitted to Him that it wasn't a pretty sight. And I asked Him to make sure He didn't miss anything at all, the secret sins, the lot.

Then it was as if He took His huge arm and cleared the table. I sensed it in my spirit. He revealed to me that His mercy was total over my life, and His grace sufficient for me.

His love is the reason I'm still going on with Him today. I'm convinced that it's been His love that has kept me and will never let me go.

So in my entire life I can boast of nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As in 1 Corinthians 1:31 "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." it can take the best part of a lifetime to experience the truth of that.

Oh Love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in You.

There's one thing I have learned over and over and over again. God wants a relationship with man today just as much as He's always done, but it must be remembered that it is a two-way relationship. If we expect Him to communicate with us, we need to communicate with Him daily through simply talking to Him, and in praise, worship, prayer and meditating on His word the Bible. It might sound boring to some and so it would be if Jesus wasn't risen from the dead and very much alive. The reality is that Jesus is alive and longs to be invited into your heart and life. Why not invite Him now, right where you are?

What do I say?.. I hear you ask.

Well before any of us can communicate with God we need to have the sin problem in our lives dealt with. If you pray the prayer below sincerely, your sin problem will be dealt with in the only way it can be, by accepting Jesus, God's Son, as your personal Saviour. God allowed His only begotten Son Jesus, to take all the punishment for man's sin and deal with it once and for all through His terrible ordeal on the day He was crucified. He endured all that for each one of us. Jesus was the only sinless man to have ever walked on this earth, and He suffered the cruelty of the cross for us, on our behalf.

If you're sincere in your heart about making a decision for God by accepting His gracious free gift of salvation and everlasting life through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ then please pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I recognise that my sin has separated me from God. I now accept You as my personal Saviour, that you paid the penalty for all my sin when you suffered and died in my place on the cross. I invite you now to come into my heart and into my life. I promise that from now on I'll try to honour You by living for You, but I know I can't do that without Your help so please help me to live for You and avoid doing the things I know to be wrong, and please give me the boldness to tell others about my decision to follow You. Amen