

Testimony

Steve West Tells His Story

I was born in June 1956 into a ‘Christian family’, in a ‘Christian country’ (England). That made me a Christian, right? Actually it didn’t! But I didn’t find that out until I was in my 40’s.

My Dad was in the Royal Air Force, so my sister and I grew up in a military family that enjoyed the luxury of travelling around the world (Singapore, Germany etc.). The constant moving presented a challenge too. In every new location I had to start from scratch and make friends all over again!

Growing up I was sent to Cubs, Scouts and Sunday School, but I never remember hearing about sin, or salvation, or the work of Christ on the cross. Sadly the Bible was never read at home and we never gave thanks to God for our meals (or anything else for that matter!). Like most lads my age, I just went along with the crowd and tried to enjoy myself.

In 1975 my Dad retired from the RAF and found work with the MOD (Ministry of Defence). He started in Larkhill, Wiltshire, but was later promoted and so moved – one snowy February day in 1979 – to a place called Bicester in Oxfordshire. I was by then engaged to my fiancée Lucy and was offered a job working at the REME workshop (‘Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers’) on the same site as my Dad.

Lucy and I were married the following June and soon after had 2 lovely sons. Then things changed. Lucy’s sister died, leaving 3 children to be raised by their grandparents. Six years later, Lucy’s Dad died. By then our family had grown to 5 sons. The final straw for Lucy was when her 18-year-old nephew was killed in Bosnia. That was the start of dark times for us as a family. Lucy began drinking *a lot*. I would often find her drunk when I got home from work.

Meanwhile our boys started attending a Sunday School in Bicester after making contact with a church through a summer Gospel Tent event in a nearby park. They were collected and dropped off every Sunday (if they wanted to go!). Then one summer’s day, about seven years later, Lucy asked if *she* could go to the Gospel Tent! I said “Yes, go”. That was on a Wednesday, and by the following Tuesday she told me she was ‘saved’. I had no idea what she meant.

When Lucy got saved my world radically changed. She stopped drinking. I really mean it: she *stopped* drinking! And smoking. No longer were there parties where we both drank and smoked. Talk about a shock. She was suddenly a different woman. I still drank and smoked around the house, but she would have a coffee and read her Bible! “It won’t last”, I told myself. “It’s just a phase”.

I tried all sorts of ways to cope with the new domestic situation. I tried to argue with her but she very wisely didn’t argue back.

“What’s changed?” I asked her.

“I know God is real,” she said, “And I don’t want you to go to Hell.”

Now, one thing I knew for sure was that we all came from monkeys. I believed in the Big Bang and the whole evolution thing, so I thought I’d show her proof of what science says and she’d be back to normal inside 3 months.

Lucy settled into a routine of going to ‘meetings’ with her new ‘saved’ friends every Sunday and Tuesday. I used to take her and then go back for her at the end but I eventually decided it would be cheaper to stay and sit through the meeting!

I started to listen to what they were preaching. I used to go home and check in the Bible to see if what they were saying was true. Then I would return each time with questions about all sorts of things: evolution, different religions, dinosaurs etc. Each time I was given an answer, or I was lent a DVD or a book that explained everything! I kept checking everything in the Bible and one by one my doubts began to fall away. I gave up on evolution. I concluded it just doesn't stack up! I realized the Bible was true. God is not a liar! Finally it began to dawn on me that I had a serious problem. Sin. My sin against God. I would try to forget about it, to ignore it, to excuse it. After all, I was a good guy, right? But it wouldn't go away.

I quite enjoyed going on Sunday and mixing with the Christians, but I still enjoyed my sin too. I did what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it. I carried on like this for several months. One day I was helping to put chairs away after the meeting when Mr Penfold Snr said to me, "Would you hold this brother... Oh, I mean, Steve." That hit me like a ton of bricks. I wasn't one of them! I was trying to be one of them; trying to be a better person. I had cut down on smoking and drinking, but I knew I was just the same old Steve underneath!

A few weeks later I was having a coffee after the meeting and Michael Penfold came and sat next to me. I told him what I was thinking.

"I enjoy coming to the meetings. I believe it all. I really do. I don't smoke as much as I did, and I have cut down drinking. But I'm not saved yet."

Michael answered by telling me about a girl who spoke to a preacher one day and told him, "I believe everything. I go to all the meetings, but God just won't seem to save me." The preacher had punctured the frustrated pride of the girl by replying, "Why should God save you?" Michael turned the question on me. "Why should God save you Steve?" He told me I didn't deserve to be saved and God didn't owe me salvation.

I was stopped in my tracks. "Why should God save me?" Why on earth would He want to? I left the building that evening in a state of shock. Lucy and I got into the car. She knew something was wrong. She said, "Let's go to Tesco's." When we got there she said, "You stay here while I go in", and off she went.

"Why should He?" "Why should He?" The words went round and round in my head as I sat in the car in the supermarket car park. Why should the Lord Jesus *ever* have come to earth? Why should he *ever* have gone to the cross? Why should He *ever* have died for an arrogant sinner like me? I realized I had effectively been telling the almighty all-powerful God of Creation, "You can just wait until I'm ready to be saved".

I put my head down. What a fool I had been! It was then that I realized that though I didn't deserve it, the Lord Jesus had really died for me. The work was done. There was nothing left for me to do but accept what He had already done for me! I looked up at the sky and said "Thank you". I told God I was so sorry that He had to die for my sin.

When Lucy came back to the car she found me in tears. But oh the joy! I knew I was saved. It was 6th June 2000. I was 44 years old. That day we were united in Christ and knew the blessing of sharing the free gift of salvation!

Do you know that you are saved? Are you sure?

Let me leave you with two verses of Scripture:

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6)

"He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life" (John 3:36)

... Gleaned from Hebron Gospel Hall