

Stories of Hope



Premier.

Contents

Ann: Absorbed in God's word	3
<hr/>	
Donna-Marie: Hip-Hop to Tip-Top	5
<hr/>	
Fran: Depression, Bereavement, Illness	9
<hr/>	
Jean-Louis: Magic to Miracles	12
<hr/>	
Chris: Flying through the storm	17
<hr/>	
Mike: Sickness to Salvation	20
<hr/>	
Andrew: Hearing God's voice in the shower	24
<hr/>	
Jean: Tragedy to Trust	28
<hr/>	
Gladys: Faith Story, Non-Christian Husband, Marriage	32
<hr/>	

Chapter 1

ANN

Absorbed in God's word

My name is Ann. I live in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. Trevor, my husband, died here at home on the 3rd of March this year.

A loving husband and I nursed him to the end. He was 13 years older than me, and he'd lived a wonderful life. So, I couldn't be angry because when I knew he was going to die, I knew all I wanted for him was to go home to be with the Lord as I want to. And the morning he died, I just lay and wanted to go home with him. And my doctor was very concerned about me. She was a Christian doctor, and she said, you know, listen to Premier Christian Radio, I believe it is very good. So, I didn't have a radio. I didn't know where to get Premier Christian Radio but I'd bought Trevor one of these Alexa things so that he could listen to jazz music which he loved.

So, I thought, Oh, I'll try this. And I asked Alexa for Premier Christian Radio and I listen to it all the time. And I have to say, I thought, this is amazing.

Every morning I woke up, I would get out of bed and listen to Premier through breakfast and whatever time I was here, it would be going all the time, and I would be absorbed in it in God's word. And it washed through me and fed me. And at night when I went to bed in the beginning, I listened on my mobile music. And that sent me off to sleep. So, without Premier, I don't know what would have happened to me to be quite honest.

God through Premier, saved my life and is saving my life.

Chapter 2

DONNA-MARIE

Hip-Hop to Tip-Top

Creative entrepreneur Donna-Marie attended school in South East London and enjoyed the academic side of it but admits that she “kind of struggled”. She was drawn into the clubbing scene, which she saw as an outlet for her emotions, and this soon became her reason for being.

Feeling invincible

“When I got to about 17, I was a serial clubber,” she explains. “At the time I thought I was having a blast – I felt like I was having an amazing time – but over the years it became a bit of a vicious cycle. When you’re in it you don’t see it that way. I thought it was all fun and innocent dancing, but now when I reflect on it the environment was actually very negative.”

Donna-Marie frequented a broad range of nightclubs, from jungle, to soulful house and garage, to R&B nights and hip-hop raves, unaware of the destruction this lifestyle was causing: “There were a lot of drugs being taken, and a lot of violence taking place around me that I wasn’t even aware of.

“The music would definitely have an influence; and the lyrical content of a lot of the secular songs would definitely influence the atmosphere and attitudes of the people in that club or rave. I’d go in there feeling invincible for some reason, and I’d often play mind games with guys, so I think my heart was quite hardened.”

A vicious cycle

While others around her were getting drawn into even more harmful habits, Donna-Marie was focused on the dancing. However, this lifestyle soon started to take its toll: “I wasn’t brought up a Christian or anything, but I seemed to have this moral compass about me.

“Even though I was in an environment that was very promiscuous and there was a lot of drug taking, I wasn’t influenced by that because I was definitely a person who was all about the atmosphere and ‘vibing’ off the music. And I loved to dance. I genuinely enjoyed it, and actually got a bit of a buzz from the attention of men. I didn’t feel the need to be promiscuous, or take drugs, or anything like that. I found my own way of enjoying that part of my life.”

Looking back, Donna-Marie can see the dangers of the clubbing scene for what they really were: “You just never know who you’re going to meet in that kind of environment, and I think wherever there is darkness, it’s going to attract dodgy characters. There are plenty about in that environment, and they are waiting and preying on innocent, naïve young individuals.

“Towards the latter years of my raving I was in a really vicious cycle. I was raving to make up for the rave I missed the night before, or a few days before, or the week before. It wasn’t meeting my needs any more. It was a cycle that needed to be broken.”

An encounter with God

Donna-Marie knew that there was something missing from her life, but she couldn't work out what it was. All she knew was that raving no longer filled the void.

“When I came to Christ it all made sense,” she explains. “I'd been attending this church for a number of weeks or months. There was an altar call and I just knew God was speaking to me. I could really sense the presence of God; I just couldn't deny it. As the altar call went out, I just found myself getting up and walking towards the front, and I just knew it was the right thing to do. It made sense.

“Coming to Christ, I suddenly felt liberated. I felt convicted of my wrongs, but I felt forgiven as I confessed my wrongs, and that lifted quite a weight off my shoulders. I really felt a sense of belonging and meaning and purpose. That was what I was looking for, but I just didn't know it at the time.

“I felt that before Christ I was literally just existing, but now I feel alive. I feel like there's meaning and purpose to my life, and I'm living it as intentionally and passionately as I can.”

Chapter 3

FRAN

Depression,
Bereavement, Illness

I've had lots of difficulties in my life. I've actually had depression since the age of 10. When my fourth child was born, my youngest, he nearly didn't live. We had such a job rearing him at all and then he got into trouble in his teens. So we've had a difficult time with my youngest son.

When he was 23, and everything had settled and he was married, we thought, *'Thank the Lord, he would come back to the Lord being baptised'*. Yet suddenly, we were told he had leukaemia. He died within four days of the diagnosis.

That was such a shock. I found myself thinking, *'But God, why did you put us through so much trouble, just when things are settling down?'* And it was almost as if God spoke to me. He said, *'Yes, I know. I had a son. And I had to let him go through a difficult time, too.'*

It made such a difference to me to know that God wasn't sending troubles at us but He was there sharing it with us. I knew for a little while that I'd be getting forgetful. But then, everybody gets forgetful, you know? You'll laugh about it and don't worry too much. But when I went to the psychiatrist just for a check-up, and he came out with the fact that I had early Alzheimer's. At first, I didn't like the idea of having Alzheimer's. But the more I thought about it, I thought, *'I'm walking every day with the Lord. It doesn't really matter quite what happens in the long run because I know it's alright with Him. I'm quite happy to leave her with the Lord, because He led me through ups and downs in my life, and He'll continue to do the same now.'*

Not long ago, I was feeling very down. I was told it was bipolar. I just

felt I couldn't make contact with God. And here's me, an 84-year-old who's lived with the Lord all these years, and yet, it doesn't feel as if He's beside me at all. I was looking everywhere. And I was looking and reading and then it was something on Premier. Something just spoke to me just into my heart just as I needed it. The answer was there.

I was looking outside for God and He was in me all the time. He was in me. Suddenly, it was like a light came on and I knew that God was there, that Jesus was real and walking beside me. And it made me happy. Goodness me. I changed and I wanted to tell everybody what difference it's made to realise that God was in me and helping me in everything.

We sometimes tend to forget the spiritual part of life, when we think about God – He is in a different dimension, living in eternity. And if we find Him, then we have a new life, a new outlook on this life. I have discovered that God is always there and deep within me, and I can trust Him.

Chapter 4

JEAN-LOUIS

Magic to Miracles

Following a particularly difficult upbringing in Beirut, Jean-Louis has devoted his life to helping others. He believes God has given him a heart to forgive those who hurt him, and to give love to those who are hurting.

“When I was born, my house wasn’t very good,” he shares. “My daddy said to me: ‘When you were born, you brought poverty to us. I wish I had bought a donkey and not you. I wish I had bought a dog and not you.’”

Jean-Louis felt worthless and unloved, and endured great suffering at the hands of another loved one: “As a little boy you feel like you’re not accepted. You feel rejected, like you’re just a number. You’re a mistake in life.

“Things got worse because my godfather, who was supposed to be teaching me about Christian life, was sexually abusing me. I didn’t trust anybody because I didn’t know who I could share things with. I felt no one would listen to me and no one would help me, so I said to myself, ‘The only person who can help me is myself.’”

Bad habits

This strategy did not bear fruit, and Jean-Louis soon found himself adopting bad habits. “I was smoking 60 Marlboro cigarettes a day. I was like a chimney, smoking one after the other. After that I started smoking cannabis. Then I started dabbling in black magic.

“I was searching to see what was true love; what was acceptance and happiness. I was searching for somebody to love me and accept me without any motive, and without wanting something in return. It was really hard. It wasn't pleasant at all.”

Jean-Louis didn't know it at the time, but things were about to go from bad to worse: “I joined the army and something happened, and I ended up in prison for forty-five days. Many times, I was kicked by the ranger all over my body.

“One of my colleagues reported me and said I was taking information to the enemy. The secret police came and took me to a secure prison, and at that prison the general feeling was: ‘If he goes into this prison, he dies. And if he comes out of this prison, it means God will make a new life for him.’”

A fresh start

Fortunately for Jean-Louis, the latter came to pass: “When I was in prison I was a Muslim, and I was praying ten times a day to Allah to save me from this situation. But then I remembered a story from the Bible about the prodigal son when he went and spent all his money, and at the end of the story he went back to his dad and asked to be his servant.

“So I said a prayer, and I still remember the words, I said: ‘Lord, save me from this case and I will follow you.’ I didn't do a deal with God,

like on the programme *Deal or No Deal*, but later in the morning the door opened, and they said: 'You can go home.' I took the bus, and then I went to the Bible bookshop and bought my first Bible."

This incredible change brought Jean-Louis to a place of forgiveness: "It was like God opened the window of heaven and poured his love on me, and he started speaking to me to go and release forgiveness to the man who had made me go to prison. I drove for over four hours to forgive that guy. And after that I went to my dad and asked him for forgiveness. But the hardest thing was going to the graveyard where my godfather was buried and releasing forgiveness for what he had done to me.

"It was hard, but I'll be honest with you: without God's love, mercy and grace, I would not be here. I would still be in a hole, beating myself up about what had happened to me in the past. But with his grace, mercy and love, I'm still standing and going forward."

Total transformation

According to Jean-Louis, this new relationship with God deeply affected him, mind body and soul: "When I came to Christ my body kind of became dead, and I rose up in Jesus with a new body, a new mentality, a new way of thinking. I started thinking in Jesus' way, not in my way. I started seeing things with God's eyes, not with Jean Louis' eyes. I started listening to the voice of God; listening with the ears of God, not my ears.

“So everything has changed. I want to be more like Jesus because he changed me. He transformed me 180 degrees. Without Christ, I wouldn’t be here. Without Christ, maybe you wouldn’t see me. Without Christ, my life would have ended a long time ago.”

Chapter 5

CHRIS

Flying through the storm

Chris was obsessed with flying from a young age. When he was a boy, his uncle gave him a model airplane which he would play with and dream of the day when he could fly a real one. That day came when Chris joined the RAF in his late teens.

After retiring from the RAF, Chris found a way to continue feeding his passion for flying in the form of hang gliding. Soon after discovering this new hobby, Chris was elected as the founder secretary of the British Hang Gliding Association, an organisation set up with the aim of introducing new regulations for the sport.

More than anyone, Chris was fully aware of the risks and dangers of hang gliding. He had seen friends killed and read many reports of hang gliding deaths around the country, but he never imagined he would be the one making the front page. One stormy Thursday afternoon, after a tough day at work, and full of cold, Chris grabbed a hang glider and took to the skies. Despite the voice inside him warning of the unsuitable conditions, Chris decided to take a chance. That day Chris was paralysed from the chest down when his glider spiralled out of control and came crashing down.

Paralysed, finances through the floor and an inability to do his most loved passion, the thought of ending his own life began to cross his mind.

In thinking about life and death, Chris started to ask other questions. He held discussions with Christian friends about why God would create us. There had to be a reason for it.

He began to see that *“Jesus was the way the truth and the life and if we’re prepared to humble ourselves, we would show more love towards each other.”*

He realised Jesus was the answer to everything and in 1981, Chris was born again. He continues to read the Bible to this day, has since gone on to work for Gideons International, and looks forward to being with the Lord Jesus in eternity.

Chapter 6

MIKE

Sickness to Salvation

Music teacher Mike endured family struggles and ill health as a youngster in Stockport. Along with a tendency toward substance misuse, the combination sent him into a downward spiral.

“My parents divorced when I was about 9 or 10,” he recalls, “and I developed epilepsy when I was 15. Quite a formative part of my life was in 2000 when I had acute liver failure. I developed autoimmune hepatitis out of nowhere, and was in Queen Elizabeth Hospital for about six weeks, in a situation where I was about to have a liver transplant.

“No one has actually ever told me why that happened. It was probably a combination of taking pretty strong epilepsy medication and absolutely hammering it, drinking beers every night. The combination probably sparked off this condition.”

Time to think

Mike remembers phoning his family to tell them that he was in hospital waiting on a transplant. He told them not to worry, but spent a full day and night sitting there alone, just thinking about life.

“I still remember it being a very odd 24 hours,” he says. “I don’t think I slept. I just sat there, pondering. I remember it because I still think it’s probably the only time in my life where I’ve sat in a chair for 24 hours. It’s not a nice thing to happen.”

The medical professionals were telling Mike that he needed to prepare

for a difficult future: “They said, ‘You’re going to have someone else’s liver and going to have to adjust your lifestyle to that and do all this stuff.’ Transplants, on average, don’t last for a lifetime, so you’re being told that, ‘We’re just shooting from the hip here.’ It’s kind of strange having those kinds of conversations with medical professions.

“I don’t remember having any fear, which is a weird thing that I don’t know how to explain, because I didn’t know Jesus at the time. I should have been quite fearful, but I wasn’t. Neither was my mum, and she can’t explain why either. She was talking to all these medical professionals and she was saying, ‘No, I don’t think that’s true actually.’ And she’s not like that. She’s not a stubborn person who refuses to live in reality.”

It turned out that the transplant didn’t go ahead, as Mike’s condition began to improve: “There was a funny dynamic about that time. I want to ask God when I get to heaven what was going on in the spiritual realm at the time because I probably missed out. At the time I had no radar for that. I’m sure there was a lot of contending going on, but God’s hand was on it.”

Opening up

Some time later, Mike started thinking about God and his purpose in life: “I don’t think I was ever anti-Christian. I guess I had a kind of grudging acceptance for it, and that it worked well for some people.

“I was never like: ‘The church is evil. It’s doing all this terrible stuff.’

I was more: 'Well, you know if it's your thing and it works for you, great, but it's not my thing. I've got my own things going on, and this patchwork belief system is working well for me at the moment.' But it wasn't really working well. It never did. I think, if anything, I had a bit of an intellectual objection to certain things."

He began attending his local church, primarily because of loneliness. "I didn't start going to church because God came down and said: 'Go to church,' he shares. "I actually went because I had nothing else to do. I was living in a flat on my own, I was going to my job, but I was a bit lonely really.

"I could feel life coming from Christianity, so I just walked in. God started talking to me in church through other people, so I had some encounters. I started going there of my own accord, and I think me doing that was getting to that final stage of opening myself up for God to actually do something. The words were becoming more and more specific, so week to week it's like God was just trying to say stuff to me. And then I think I just started to realise that God is real."

Mike pinpoints the day his life changed as 9th September 2006: "I remember being face down on the floor in my bedroom for about 15 minutes; not because I was under the power of God or anything, but just because, when I said these words to God, I wanted to say them and mean them.

"So I got my Bible, read Romans 12 and said: 'God, I offer you my life as a living sacrifice.' My life is just unrecognisable now. I've come really alive. This is what life is!"

Chapter 7

ANDREW

Hearing God's voice
in the shower

In the summer of 1996, Andrew was taking a shower when he suddenly heard a voice. Andrew believes that on that day he received a prophetic message, and that message has stuck with him ever since.

When Andrew and his wife found out they were pregnant they were overjoyed. But 21 weeks into the pregnancy, the scan results that followed were shocking. The doctors told Andrew that the child ‘was not viable’ and that there was no sign of life. However, Andrew clung to the promise he felt God had spoken to him in that moment in the shower months before.

Remarkably, the foetus continued to grow and several weeks later, Imogen was born. Doctors warned that the chances of survival for baby Imogen were extremely low. Years later and Imogen is now a bright, bubbly, and healthy young woman.

Here Andrew reflects on God’s provision and presence over years of hardship and uncertainty:

“What I’m about to say might be absolutely unbelievable, but it’s absolutely true. We have to go back to August of 1996, 6 in the morning, finished a shower, water was a sort of dripping and I heard a voice. Maybe it was an angel. And the voice says, *‘There will be a special baby, and there will be changes.’*”

Following this incredible yet strange moment in which Andrew believes he heard a message from God, he and his wife had a surprise when they found out that they were pregnant. 21 weeks later, however, they received some shocking news.

“The foetus wasn’t growing. And so were referred to Professor Kip Ross and the Harris Birthright Centre. He took one look at Eileen and the scan. He said, *‘Impossible, the child is not viable.’* And he got one of those fancy machines they got there, did a lot of scanning and said, *‘See there’s nothing there. There are no signs of life.’*”

“There are nine anomaly scan reports, which I still have. On three of them, it states quite clearly, the child cannot live, it’s impossible.”

Several weeks of tests and scans later, Andrew and his wife were told their baby was showing positive signs of growth, and delivering her as soon as possible was necessary.

“In week 34, they did the caesarean birth. Amazing enough, Imogen was crying and screaming like any other child. They put her into intensive care and then she spent the next six weeks in special baby unit to keep for the year. She was a year old and they were still saying the child cannot live. It’s impossible because she’s just too small. None of the data they have said this child can live.”

It was at this point that Andrew recalled that spiritual encounter back before Imogen was born. Remembering those prophetic words that he had heard. Andrew was able to hold on to his faith, despite all the uncertainties of life.

“When you live it, second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, it was never easy, because you never knew what was going to happen. But somehow, these words I was told back in August 1996, they kept on saying, ‘Now this child is going to live. This child will

be. I've been told this.' I remember saying all this at work. People laughed at me. They said I was mad. No one actually believed that a voice said everything will be okay.

“And it has been okay. There was something other than just luck.”

Against all odds, and by the grace of God, Imogen is now a hardworking and ambitious girl. She is able to experience life and embrace many opportunities in the same way as her peers. She went through her school years and passed her GCSEs with flying colours. She's very charismatic, very pretty, and is now training to be an actor.

“Because of what happened to Imogen, I would say there's definitely a God, without a doubt. I've always known that she was meant to be because of what was said back in 1996. If ever there was a miracle, she is a miracle child. She's here for a reason.”

Chapter 8

JEAN

Tragedy to Trust

London-based Jean never could have imagined what it would feel like to lose a daughter, but it was through this terrible tragedy that she discovered a new life in Christ.

“My daughter Charlene attended school, which she liked very much,” Jean shares. “She had numerous friends, and her childhood was good. During the time when she and her sister were growing up, her character became very aggressive; very argumentative. She just didn’t seem herself.

“I knew something wasn’t quite right, but I couldn’t grasp it. I just thought it was because teenagers tend to squabble over silly little things. It was getting a bit too much. I think maybe she was going through stuff she couldn’t understand herself.”

The doctors recommended that Charlene should see a psychiatrist, so Jean took her along. “They talked to her about what she was seeing, what she was hearing, and they told us they’d be in touch,” Jean continues.

“After about nine months of her being in and out of hospital, my sister Marlene talked to her about the Lord. She said that Jesus Christ came to demolish evil spirits, and that she could be free from it if she gave her life to Christ. And she did. I just took a step back. I allowed Marlene to do what she needed to do because she knew more than me about the Lord. Then Charlene got baptised. I still have the certificate for it.”

Devastating news

Charlene stayed the night with a friend on one occasion, and afterwards the friend's mother called Jean to say that she was very concerned about her. "Charlene told her that she was hearing voices, and she went to the park really late at night," Jean relates.

"Then I got another phone call from a friend who said that Charlene had gone to Westminster Bridge with a friend, and how she was sitting on the wall, looking at the water, and the next thing they knew was she had jumped into the River Thames. A passer-by went into the Thames to try and save her, but the current was too strong and he had to turn back."

"I just couldn't believe what had happened; what I had heard. It just couldn't be her. It was heartbreaking. Really heartbreaking."

Breaking the curse

While absolutely devastated by her daughter's death, Jean believes she wouldn't have come to faith if it hadn't happened. Utterly bereft, she opened her heart to the gospel: "I always look back at her picture and say to myself, 'It was through her death that I found Christ.'"

A close friend had told Jean that her family was cursed and she needed God to break it: "At the time my daughter died, my ears were opened, and I was listening because I didn't know which way to turn."

I heard her say there was a curse on my family and the only way to break that curse was through the blood of Jesus Christ. She told me that I needed to repent and be saved.

“I just felt I had no other way to turn but to listen to what she was saying and to do what she said I needed to do. I remember going to church and to outdoor events, and listening to worship. Through those songs is where I met Jesus.”

Healed and whole

People frequently ask Jean how she got through this experience and has been able to keep going: “For me it’s about trusting in the word of God. He heals the broken-hearted, he comes to set the captives free.

“I’ve put my faith in him and trust him. He’s healed me from that grief. It’s just amazing! He has given me peace and joy in my heart, and I’ve never looked back. My life has completely changed because of him.”

Chapter 9

GLADYS

Faith Story,
Non-Christian Husband,
Marriage

My name is Gladys Clifton. I'm originally from Wrexham, in north Wales. I was not brought up in a Christian family.

My sister and I - I was 12 and she was 10 - we were playing outside in the street. A lady came across the road and she said to us, "Come on, you kids. Come over and ask Jesus into your lives." Which we were quite panicky about. We were made to sit down by the mercy seat as it were, and dedicate our lives to the Lord. We did it because we were terrified in case we didn't get out of there. So we did that. And we came out of there. And I never gave it a second thought.

It came to 1951, a man from Coventry came over on his service from the army. We went out together for a couple of nights. And then he had to come back to Coventry. And this went on for about six weeks, just meeting at weekends. And after six weeks, we got married. That was a short courtship, wasn't it? For sure, it was planned by the Lord because I mean, it was just incredible how it happened, really. But he was a non-Christian.

When I came to Coventry, I had a bit of a culture shock, because coming from a very small village, some of the things that people used to do, it was part of my nature. I missed my mother so much and her model teaching, so I went to the church in Coventry. And I just flipped it in another church, you know, for a little while.

Jump forward now to 1968. May 27th, at 4 pm there was a crisis in my life, and it was marital problems. And it was absolutely devastating. On the point of mental breakdown, I found myself on the floor prostrate before the Lord crying so much that I just didn't

know what to do or where to go. And I heard God said to me, *'I've been waiting all these years, for you to come to me. And I've been calling you and calling you but you didn't take any notice. So I had to bring you to this place where you are now. And that was a real revelation. And God said, if your marriage breaks up and you leave your husband, he will be lost forever.'*

Because I took my marriage vows very seriously, I stayed with him. He comes to church when without a break on a regular basis. We've been married 64 years, God's been there all along. After 1968, I just got stronger and stronger. And I spent more and more time with the Lord. And I went to church on a regular basis. And church meant everything to me.

And as I struggled every day, and every week, the more my burden got bigger and the more the devil was on my back, the more I turned to the Lord. Now at this present time, I need him in my life every minute of the day, and I know that He's there. I put on the armour of God every morning. I asked Him to touch from His holy hand. When I was offered this opportunity as a child, it didn't mean anything to me. But I would say don't wait as long as I did before you come to know the Lord. I'm glad I did what I did if I had my time all over again, I would do it all over again. Because I believe it's what the Lord wanted me to do. I never cease to give Him praise for what He's done for me.

About Premier

Premier supports people on their faith journey and helps them put their faith into action by providing spiritual nourishment and resources. We touch more than a million people's lives a week through radio, magazines and interactive websites with on-demand video and audio, as well as through our Christian phone helpline, Premier Lifeline.

Premier's mission is to enable people to put their faith at the heart of daily life and to bring Christ into their communities, and we represent a strong Christian voice across the UK.

For more information see *premier.org.uk*

The Premier logo consists of the word "Premier." in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a dark red speech bubble shape. The speech bubble has a tail pointing downwards and to the left.

Premier.