

My name is David Chalkley. My wife, Sylvia, and I are both Christians and members of Wigmore Evangelical Free Church. We have shared many of life's experiences but we have very different stories to tell. These are just a few of the things that have made an impact on **my** life.

I was brought up as one of four children (two girls, two boys) in Luton, Bedfordshire, Town of the straw hat industry, Vauxhall Motors and Luton Town FC. My brother and I spent some very happy times on the terraces at Kenilworth Road, Luton Town's ground, and we still support them to this day (now that really is staying power).

But the big impact on my life in those days was not the football but my mother and father. I can thank God for Mum and Dad who were both lovely Christian people. They did their best to teach us kids the right way to live and they took us to church and sent us to Sunday School.

Like many lads, though, I wasn't keen on all this 'religious' stuff. It all seemed a bit boring and I preferred to be out with my mates, meeting up with the girls, having a few drinks and generally doing my own thing.

At 18 years of age I was married. Shortly after, my first daughter, Debbie, was born followed by another, Amanda. and a son, Darren. I wasn't a Christian but I felt it was important (for some reason) to send my kids to Sunday School as I had been by my mum and dad.

It was one of my kid's Sunday School teachers who invited me to a 'special' meeting. A visiting evangelist by the name of Rolph Burgundy would be talking. Well I have never forgotten it. He talked about sin and Hell and Jesus Christ and Heaven. The Bible says that 'the penalty for sin is death' (eternity in hell) *Romans 6:23*. It also says that all (every one of us - no exceptions) have 'sinned and fall short of God's glory' *Romans 3:23*. This was very bad news for me – I knew I was going to hell, but there was good news as well, the Bible also says that 'the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' *Romans 6:23*. It was He who bore the punishment for my sin on the cross at Calvary. At the preacher's appeal, I confessed that I was a sinful person and asked Jesus to forgive me and come into my life– and He did just that. I felt a wonderful sense of freedom within me. I now knew without doubt that Heaven would be my eternal home.

I won't bore you with the details but my Christian life did not live up to it's early promise. God had forgiven me for all the wrong in my life, unconditionally, but I wasn't doing my part and living for Him. God, however did live up to His promise. He said in the Bible 'I will never leave you or forsake you' *Hebrews 13:5* and He never has.

I was enjoying watching my family grow up, doing the things that families do. We loved Christmas time with all the decorations, the Christmas tree, the food and the presents - these were good times with my children. But, of course, we must never take anything for granted

My son Darren was murdered at the age of 20. This was a massive blow as you can imagine and it proved to be a turning point in my life. He was walking his girlfriend home one evening and was attacked in the street by a young thug, fracturing Darren's skull. I and the family were absolutely shattered as he clung to life on a life support machine but instead of feeling anger at a God Who would allow such a thing to happen to my son, the event had the effect of re-kindling my weak faith. God showed me then just how much He cares.

I was desperately worried and wanted to speak to our friend and the chaplain of the hospital, John Lawson. I was told however that John could not be contacted.

I knew Darren was at the point of death and I went into the hospital chapel to pray. It wasn't long before I was aware of someone standing behind me and turned to see Rev Lawson. John told me that he had been driving his car and had felt that God was saying to him "release Darren to Me". He had come to the hospital straight away.

It was a very difficult thing to do but the family joined hands with our friend and left my son in the Lord's hands. Darren died shortly after.

We held a memorial Service and the church was packed with young people, many hearing God's Good News of forgiveness for the very first time as I had done years before – God is good.

At Darren's funeral, the Pastor spoke on the verse 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds' *John 12:24*. I thought of all those young people at the memorial service.

I was still desperately worried about my son's eternal future however and, one Sunday evening, when I was feeling particularly low, Sylvia and I decided to get away from the routine and visit a church we hadn't been to for a long time. It turned out that there was a visiting speaker that evening who we had never met before. He started his sermon by saying that he was going to abandon his prepared talk in favour of the following text as "someone here really needs to hear this tonight" - 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds'. I learned a great lesson that night. The Bible tells us: 'Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour who daily bears our burdens' *Psalms 68:19*

I still grieve for my son but I know that I can safely leave everything in God's hands.

Since Then...Have things been easy? Well nearly every member of my immediate family has been through terrible personal traumas since that time. Things that have often shaken us to the core. You could well be suffering in the same way. The difference now is that, as a Christian, and by personal experience, I know the Lord has it all in hand. So can you.

'I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' Jeremiah 29 v 11

Our Hope...Arrived when Jesus was born into this world for the express purpose of dying for you and for me on the cross at Calvary, to take the punishment that we should rightly take for our sins and to save us from hell and give us a glorious future in Heaven

How can this happen?...Do what I did all those years ago. Confess your sins and ask Jesus into your life, if you haven't already done so, and your eternal future will be secure. God bless you.

David Chalkley