

A Personal Testimony

Hi! My name is Jim. Well, James really, but almost everyone knows me as Jim. My wife and I are old age pensioners living happily together in Devon. You are most welcome to peruse this site and compare it with your own thoughts and ideas about the matters presented thereon. This page is rather personal, though, and is included in case you have a curiosity about the site's author.

Each of us is a unique individual, and our characters and personalities are shaped by our experiences and the way we react to them. I hope the rest of this page will give you an idea of the course my life has taken, as I share with you something of my development paying particular attention to the spiritual aspects.

Some folks have the advantage of being born into a family that is rich in Christian practices and commitment. Ours was not one such, but with good, caring, working class parents, my younger brother and I enjoyed a happy childhood in an environment very different materially from that experienced by youngsters now. There were farthings in those days, and we had to make our own fun. There was no car, telephone, TV or their ilk for us.

Neither Mum nor Dad had made a commitment to the Lord before or during our childhood. When Dad was asked about attending church, he used to assert that the next time he went into a church he would be carried in! Having said that, I gleaned from time to time that he had attended a Sunday School occasionally, which I think may have waved a Primitive Methodist Baptist banner. Mum believed in prayer

and angels, because she encouraged me to say my prayers before going to bed:

*Lord, keep us safe this night,
Secure from all our fears.
May angels guard us while we sleep
Till morning light appears. Amen.*

We lived in London much of the time during the second world war and I still have strong memories of the blitz, doodlebugs and raging fires. Dad was a fireman. Mercifully, we all survived. I can still remember quite clearly when we were standing in the back garden and a doodlebug with its engine shut down glided straight towards us. At the last moment it tilted to its left and came down near the railway line. Just one of the many occasions when my overworked guardian angel has looked after me. There have been many others.

I remember being taken regularly to a local Methodist Sunday School by an elderly gentleman when I was about four or five. We used to sing choruses and probably had lessons. I was a bit puzzled, though, as to who Grant God was whom the leader addressed in prayer. These gentlemen deserve a particularly bright crown in glory for their love and sorely tested patience here on earth.

A little later, my brother and I were sent to the Gospel Hall Sunday School which was held in a temporary tin tabernacle erected on a nearby bomb-site. This was not because of our parents' religious persuasion, however! More to do with a bit of blessed relief for an hour or so on a Sunday afternoon. It is a matter of debate whether I spent more time outside the door (usually for wishing to entertain the other children in attendance) or inside the classroom.

The Open Brethren at the Gospel Hall were all with it. They had a magic lantern which threw coloured pictures on the wall. This device used to get rather hot, being powered by gas, and it was always a great disappointment when the mantle burnt out and had to be replaced. A fairly frequent occurrence. But there was one point in which the Brethren could not be faulted. They held the Bible in high esteem, and gave us an excellent grounding in the scriptures, encouraging us to learn verses and passages by heart.

I passed my 11+ examination and was awarded a London County Council scholarship to a public school. It proved a great privilege. Needless to say, my parents had to make considerable sacrifices to keep me kitted out in school uniform, etc. Eight years I spent there, and I owe a great deal to the education which I received. It taught me to take knocks and pick myself up again afterwards, and to treat everybody as equals. Contrary to expectation, those who attend such an institution do not develop any feelings of superiority over others. At school I became familiar with the hymns, liturgy and litanies used by the Church of England. These I still value today.

A characteristic that has been with me all my conscious life is a huge curiosity about what makes things tick. Mum used to relate how I was always taking things apart to see how they worked, but was fair enough to acknowledge also that I was able to fit them together again afterwards. I was constantly asking questions, and wishing to get to the bottom of any matter that crossed my path.

There are two Christian men who have had a profound influence upon my life for good, one young and one more elderly. The young one was called Austin, and he was most generous towards me. I learned how

to ride a motor bike on his machine, a 500cc in-line twin shaft-drive Sunbeam. He was one of the local Brethren, and we shared many things. I was allowed to help him build a model railway from sleepers, chairs and lengths of rail, using a gauge to ensure the lines were the exact distance apart. I ran a kite club at the Gospel Hall, and Austin was the adult presence required by the Oversight. Incidentally, this was not the only club I ran as a youngster. Austin and I also combined to print things, Austin using the silk screen method while I tackled the letterpress side. (I had earlier sold half-a-crown shares in my printing 'business' to raise the capital to buy type and a treadle press, the latter sorely testing the strength of the joists in the attic of our home! It went up in bits, of course, which I assembled, replacing the treadle with a quarter horsepower electric motor operating through a variable oil drive.)

I still have a thirty-four thousand entry hymn index which I compiled during my teens, each entry typed on a slip of paper five inches by one. Sadly, it was all largely wasted effort as the advent of the computer has provided a much more efficient solution.

In my early teens I struggled to decide whether or not God was real. Everything made sense, but I felt that I could never know for certain. I was encouraged to 'just believe'. I did the best I could, and was baptised by total immersion at the Gospel Hall when aged fourteen. Whether or not faith was strong enough at that point to make me a Christian is indeterminate in this life.

The Brethren had many answers to the questions I posed, but not all. There were passages in the Bible (*e.g.* Romans 9) that I was not able to resolve. In my late teens, I

was introduced to Mr W who took a group of young men to Westminster Chapel where we sat under the ministry of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 'the Doctor'. Mr W, the second major influence in my life, and the Doctor had the answers I needed, and my understanding of the scriptures deepened. But I still didn't know for certain. I did know, though, that there was no chance of my being brainwashed into believing.

I was encouraged by my friends to keep seeking, and was assured that God would answer in His own good time if I was earnest in my search. Well, at the time it happened, I can't honestly say that I was seeking particularly hard. Spiritual reality comes to folk in millions of different ways. Here is how it happened for me:

I was reading at the end of the day the preface to an old copy of "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul" by the hymn writer, Philip Doddridge. One fairly ordinary sentence hit me hard. I think it was something along the lines, "Consider what God has done for you – what have you done for Him?" I must check some time when I can get to my books (currently inaccessible). I can't give you time and date for this occasion, but it is still vivid. It started a chain reaction, leading to a clear understanding that my sins had their part in nailing Christ to the Cross, and this produced true heartfelt repentance with tears. Also clear was the fact that I hadn't found Him, He had revealed Himself to me. Faith took a gigantic leap forward. At last I knew where I stood. Whether this was my conversion or a clarion call to service is not clear to me, but that doesn't matter. I was called to dedicate my life to the Lord's service, and this call has been joyfully obeyed in my love and work for the benefit of others.

It is important to note that my parents, particularly Mum, were wary of the depth of my friendships with Austin and, later, Mr W. This was quite understandable, but my relationships with these two gentlemen were 100% proper, and I was able to give a full assurance that this was so. I have already indicated the activities I shared with Austin. Mr W was superintendent of a children's mission. I and others assisted him in this work. He was a toy importer and wholesaler by trade, and I frequently helped him make up the orders from his warehouse, and travelled around with him in his van as he delivered the goods to the shops. This gave me opportunity to deepen my knowledge of the Scriptures and Christian matters. I was grateful to my parents for their trust and for accepting my assurances. Were they less trusting, I would have missed out on these opportunities to develop. I have tried in my turn to pass on something of what I had gained to the youngsters who have shared activities with me over the years.

By the way, I had the delight of learning that both Mum and Dad had made a commitment to God at an evangelical meeting which they had attended after moving close to my future in-laws in Devon. They were frequently found thereafter reading their Bibles.

I became a member of Westminster Chapel, which subscribed to the Congregational denomination, and remained so for the seven years before I left London. The Doctor's ministry was most edifying, and I took every opportunity to attend – morning and evening for the Sunday services, and on Friday evenings for the Lectures. It was an eighteen mile round trip each time, frequently achieved by pedal cycle. I survived the traffic and my spirit profited greatly.

From school I passed on to university, which was the expected thing for us to do, where I studied for a B.Sc. in Special Chemistry. Well, studied isn't really quite the right word. Certainly, I attended nine tenths of the lectures, but spent the rest of the time following my many other interests. The truth was that my inclinations were towards the practical rather than towards the academic. I nearly obtained the degree without effort, but it wouldn't have been deserved had I succeeded.

Faced with selecting a career, as with all important issues, I put the matter in the Lord's hands and kept an open mind. I wasn't quite expecting the answer I received, but two respected Christian men, entirely independently, advised me to teach. This couldn't be ignored, so I put the matter to the test and joined the staff of a large comprehensive school. The challenge was huge, but within a week I knew it was my vocation. After three happy years, I heeded the advice of my Deputy Head and left to become qualified.

A training college in or near London wasn't an option, as a break with my other interests was vital if I was going to spend any time in study. I was accepted as a mature student by my first and only choice of college which was located here in Devon. Two years later I was awarded a Certificate in Education and joined the teaching profession duly qualified.

Accommodation at the beginning of the course was in lodgings with three fellow students on a bed and breakfast basis. Boarding at this house during the week was a young Christian girl of a rather shy disposition who was working in a local office, returning home at the weekends. We were mutually attracted, and were married a couple of years later. The Lord's hand

was clearly recognisable, and we have enjoyed some forty years happily facing the world together. Incidentally, I had met three young ladies in my earlier life that I would cheerfully have married, but who were not inclined to take on so great a liability. God always knows what is best for us.

The Christian family with whom we lodged attended a Brethren assembly, and at first I attended with them. I was willing to assist in the children's work, but the response to my offer was not very encouraging. The Lord clearly had other plans for us. As my future wife and I were on our way to the meeting one Sunday morning, we passed a Baptist church. On its noticeboard was displayed a poster saying, "A warm welcome given to all believers." No doubt a warm welcome was given to all others, too! We turned aside, and found the sign to be true. We had been guided to our spiritual home.

Soon after marriage we lived in a small two-roomed flat. We became members of this Baptist church, and were soon running an open youth club with the assistance of others at the church. At that time, we were also hosting an after-church activity for the young people in our flat. We were looking to find a suitable home, and found what we felt was the ideal solution. It was a reasonably large house, with a combined sitting/dining room ideally suited to the Sunday after-church. Furthermore, it was closer to church than our flat. While we were considering this property, one of my fellow schoolmasters told me that the house alongside his was for sale.

Believing that the Lord leads in these kinds of circumstances, we felt we ought to have a look, which we did. We both felt a strong conviction that this was where we were to

set up home. It didn't make sense to us at the time, especially as we had after-church to consider. This house was out in the country and needed a map reference to find it. However, just as Abraham responded to the call to a new land, we upped and obeyed. With hindsight, we can affirm divine leading was for the best. In the next decade, over a thousand people signed our visitors book, many of them children.

The open youth club at church blossomed to over two hundred members, and we were privileged to lead it for seventeen years. My teaching was in no way nine to five for five days a week, and I was soon involved in many lunchtime and out-of-school activities. These ranged from a Bridge club to a Christian Union, and 'top of the pops' to a handbell ringing group. Home, which we renamed as Providence for obvious reasons, was also fully involved. We organised camps in the orchard, and took children home overnight. This was a very busy, happy and rewarding time of life.

It has to be said that we could not do such a work in the climate of today's society. We never worked with any child whose parents were not comfortable with our activities. The trust shown towards us was immense. But the children were always completely secure. There is One who sees our every deed and knows our innermost thoughts, and as His servant, I could never behave improperly. All was above board, and there were no false accusations. For my part I trusted and respected both youngsters and parents, and they responded in like fashion towards me. There were no written permissions, although for the big occasions like a camp or fireworks party, I would produce a handout giving details. Harking back, on one occasion while teaching in London, I took my whole class of twenty-eight twelve-year-old boys for a day's

outing on to Epsom Downs single-handedly. That ratio wouldn't be allowed nowadays!

These were the years of plenty. Too much good was being achieved for the Devil to leave it alone. Unjustified opposition arose both at school and at church, possibly fuelled by jealousy. Actions of mine were picked on which were, with the slightest of investigations, demonstrably innocent. The result for me was that I retired early from teaching, as much as I loved it. At church there was a person or persons who disapproved of the youth club so much that they wished to see it closed down. To placate them we had stopped selling the shandy flavoured drink freely available in the shops as that was considered an incentive to the youngsters to drink, we were forbidden to have a bowling game because bowling alleys were associated with public houses, and we were falsely accused of making a mess outside the entrance when the mess and beer cans originated from a group of local youths who used the shelter of the entrance as a meeting place at unsocial hours. My problems at school were used as an excuse to close the club, even though there was a deputy leader and staff who could have continued the work without me. It was one of the saddest moments of my life on the evening when we had about ninety children waiting for club to open, and we were forbidden to let them in.

Round about this time I began helping at a children's sports club which my daughter had joined. At the time of writing, I am still helping there with twenty-three years of service behind me. As currently required, I have enhanced CRB clearance.

At the same time as I retired from teaching and the youth club was closed, the front

wall of our house in the country collapsed three weeks after it sustained storm damage. We called in a builder right away, but he was unable to stop the collapse. With the upstairs floors propped, we didn't lose everything. However, the insurance company wouldn't pay up claiming that, because it didn't occur during or immediately after the storm, it was not storm damage. The house was of cob construction and had stood for four hundred years, so it was rather a shame it gave up under our ownership.

I know just how Job must have felt when everything around him was taken away. We didn't understand the Lord's purposes in all these events, but were sure He had His reasons. Throughout these occurrences, we sought God's will and maintained our integrity.

Health problems began at this time, and caused considerable pain for a couple of decades, and I experienced mobility problems. My contribution to church life took on other forms such as the church directory, the public address system, and the tape library. These were given up reluctantly with decreasing mobility. The diagnosis of one of my ailments was made about five years ago when much pain relief was given. A second ailment was diagnosed more recently which has responded to medication, and I have been given two new hips to help me get around. I can now climb the ladder to my computers, which has allowed this website to be constructed.

Life has obviously had its ups and downs, some of which have been mentioned above. I placed my life in God's hands while still young and have had ample opportunity to test the truth of His promises.

I bear this testimony from long experience: God the Father rules, Christ the Son lives, and the Holy Spirit is still at work on the Earth. The many promises found in the Bible are fully honoured when they are grasped, and are totally dependable. God is unchanging, does His own work, and guides us towards what is in our best interests. No man can make another a Christian by persuasion or by any other means. Our responsibility is to be found faithful, and to present the Gospel to our fellow men and women, both those who are near and those afar, by whatever means are at our disposal. Christians are refined by pain, adversity and just chastening. Asking and seeking are rewarded.

May God bless you as He has blessed me. There is no greater joy.