

LIGHT
Out of
DARKNESS

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All these things

Jesus says “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well”. Matthew 6:33.

This is a tremendous promise from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says that God will provide all our needs if we are seeking to do His will. He says earlier in the chapter not to worry about even the basic necessities of food and clothing because the God who provides food for the birds and clothes the flowers will surely provide for those seeking to serve Him. Jesus didn't just say this but put it into practice in His own ministry often not knowing where He would eat or sleep that night and when He sent His disciples out to preach in the towns and villages of Israel, He told them not to take any money, food or extra clothes but to trust God to provide all that they would need, Matthew 10:9-10.

They learnt that God would lead and guide and that they could look to Him for everything necessary for His work. In the early days of SACO (Southampton Asian Christian Outreach) we saw the trustworthiness of this promise in action and this has continued ever since to God's glory. This account is written to witness to what God has done and to encourage all who read it to trust Him more.

A shop by August

It has been our policy right from the start not to appeal for funds or to take collections in our meetings but rather to trust God for His provision for whatever we needed. In this spirit in January 1983, I began asking the Lord to provide a shop as a base for outreach to the Asian community of Southampton by August of that year.

I had no funds but had spent 3 years training with Operation Mobilisation (OM) in India and the UK (based in Coventry) where I had learnt about Indian culture, history, customs and religion and about how to share about Jesus with folk from Hindu, Sikh and Muslim backgrounds. I had also learnt in practice that God provides for His people's needs by trusting God for my financial support whilst with OM.

God had never let me down and I reasoned that if God really wanted a shop for Asian outreach in Southampton then it was no more difficult for Him to raise the money for that than it had been to raise my support. This was a strong conviction and it needed to be as it was challenged by some who could not understand why I did not want to even mention financial needs in meetings.

The idea of the shop was to sell Third World goods, largely from India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh, which would help the poor there, and also to provide a non-threatening venue where Asian folk interested to find out more about Jesus could come and enquire without having to enter a church. We would have Christian books and Bibles in all the main Asian languages spoken in Southampton and other resources for spreading the Good News about Jesus. It was also envisioned that I would live over the shop so that I would always be available to enquirers and that we could let out any spare rooms to young Christian men interested to get involved in ministry to Asian

people. This was to be a multi-purpose centre for the ministry that God was calling me to amongst the Asian community.

Where do you start if you want to step out and trust the Lord in faith for something? Well, with the first step. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he said "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water" and Jesus said "Come", leaving Peter with a decision as to whether or not to take a step onto the water in faith. He could have stayed safely in the boat but he chose to trust Jesus and stepped out and walked on the water. That first step of faith must have taken a lot of courage but what a thrill to be the only other man in history other than Jesus to walk on water! God will reward every step of faith that we take in obedience to Him.

On 10th March we held a prayer meeting for all those interested to pray for outreach to Asian people in Southampton. About 30 people came and we had a good time to present the vision of a shop as an outreach centre and to commit it to God in prayer. After the meeting, a Baptist pastor told me that he knew of a Christian who was selling a shop near the Asian area of the city and he gave me his son's phone number.

I got in contact and arranged to meet the estate agent to see over the shop.

It was going to be important that any possible shop should be on the outskirts of the Asian area so that any potential enquirers would not be deterred from coming in by fear of being seen by others from their community who might not approve of them showing interest in the Christian faith. It would also need to have enough accommodation above the premises to allow for me and some lodgers to live there.

This shop was an ideal size and in an ideal position on the main pedestrian route from the Asian area to the nearby market.

The asking price was £26,000 which may not seem a lot nowadays but meant much more in 1983, especially if you only had about £70 donated towards the work!

On 17th March, I visited the local CLC warehouse to look at the Asian language Christian books that they had there and having been given a tour of the store, I shared the vision of an outreach shop with the lady in charge of the Asian literature. Before I was going, we decided to pray together about the idea of an outreach shop and she prayed that God would provide the shop by August. I had not mentioned this target and so I asked her why she had prayed for that particular time. She said that she felt God saying that August would be the right time for such a shop and this was the first confirmation from the Lord about this timing.

I just kept on praying for the shop and that the Lord would provide for it and after some weeks, on 25th April, the owner (whom I had never met) phoned me and said that he would really like his shop to be used for Christian work and he lowered the price to £22,000. By this time about £500 had been donated towards the project by different folk whose hearts had been moved by God to give without any appeals for funds. A long way to go!

On 12th May, a committee was convened, largely made up of ministers of various churches with an interest in spreading the gospel to the Asian community in Southampton and a very godly Asian believer, Vincent Nurmahi, and it was decided to go ahead with setting up a charitable trust to oversee the work. This was to be called Southampton Asian Christian Outreach (SACO). We prayed again for God's provision for this fledgling work. The next day the owner phoned again lowering the price to £20,000. We still only had £500, however, and we were making more progress through the price coming down than the funds going up!

He phoned again in June saying that he had talked things over with his son and he wanted to lower the price again to £16,000! We still did not have anything like that kind of money however and so we could only go on praying. Time was ticking away towards the August deadline and my faith was being tested to continue to pray for the provision of a shop by that time. People would ask why did it have to be by August and all I could say was that it seemed to be right.

Meanwhile Vincent Nurmahi and I had been visiting various Asian Christians in the city and we had the first monthly meeting of the Asian Christian Fellowship on 18th June. About 80 people, including a delegation from Oxford Asian Christian Church, attended to hear the Christian testimony of a Pakistani lady from Muslim background. She shared her testimony on other occasions in the city and, within a month or so, two Muslim ladies had put their trust in Christ through being moved by her story of forgiveness and a changed life.

On 22nd June, we had the first monthly prayer meeting for the work where Christians from different churches with a heart for the Asian people of the city joined us to pray.

Around this time, the owner of the shop phoned again (I still had not met him at this time) and I could tell that he was wondering whether we were ever going to buy this shop. He had been very patient and kind in lowering the price but we just did not have the money.

He said, "Are you still interested in the shop?"

"Yes, we're still interested but we don't have the money yet" I replied.

"Well, someone else has offered me £20,000 for it".

There was a pause and I thought that it was all over for that shop and silently asked the Lord to raise up some alternative. Then he said, "But if you wanted it for God's work, I would sell it to you for £16,000. How much do you have?"

"About £1,600."

There was another pause and then he said, "You take the shop and when you've got the money, pay me."

My heart sang in praise to God. He had provided us with a shop just over a month before August! Within a few days, a single donation from a wonderful godly lady almost doubled our funds and the SACO committee confirmed our intention to buy the shop at a meeting on 30th June.

God's unchanging faithfulness

The shop was in need of extensive repairs and we started to use the money we had to get it ready for use but I felt that this man had been so good in lowering his price and then being willing to wait for his money that God would want him to be paid as soon as possible. So since we had about £1,600 donated in the first 6 months of the year, I set the target in prayer that we would have £1,000-£1,500 donated each month from then on. No-one knew that target except the few people who came to pray for the work at the monthly prayer meetings and yet the money came every month until the shop was paid for and then it reduced to the level needed to maintain the work.

The repairs to the shop took many months and when I eventually moved in on 7th. December, there was still trouble as I was greeted by a smell of gas and water pouring through the kitchen roof. On top of that, the person helping me move put all my personal things, including sponge-bag and toothbrush etc., in his car boot and then managed to break his key off in the car boot lock! I did not have an encouraging first

night in my new home as the gas and water had to be turned off. Since there was only gas fire heating, this meant going to bed quickly on a cold December night and not even having a chance to brush my teeth! I knew, however, that God's work always progresses in the face of difficulties and hardships and I was assured that He would bless this new beginning.

I did not have any furniture or household goods (not even knives and forks) but different folk donated furniture and brought boxes of various things. When all was sorted out, there was just enough of everything that was needed to equip the accommodation for me and two lodgers. No-one coordinated that and there could easily have been 23 frying pans and no tin opener but everything was just right.

One of the last things needed were 4 dining-room chairs and the last phone call that I had about furniture for the shop went like this;

"Do you still need furniture for the shop?"

"No thanks, we've got everything we need now."

"Well, I've got some things in my loft that you might like to look at."

"What are they?"

"Four dining-room chairs."

God had provided everything!

We opened the shop with a small pre-Christmas stock of Tearcraft/Traidcraft goods and Christian books in Asian languages on 12th December, just in time for folk to buy the charity Christmas cards and Christian calendars that I had ordered in faith. It remained my policy all the time that I managed the shop to order what I thought that we needed for

stock in faith, without even asking about our financial position and this challenged several Treasurers at first until they saw that the right amount of money was always there.

The prayer meetings were always held on the third Wednesday in the month and these would fall somewhere between 15th-21st. Twice it happened that, on the night of the prayer meeting, we had only had a few hundred pounds donated so far that month towards our unannounced monthly target of £1,000-£1,500. We really cried out to the Lord to provide for His work and prayed specifically for money to be donated by the end of the month to reach the target. The prayer meeting on 21st. December was held in the shop and I received a call from a church offering £1,000 actually while we were praying!! What a fantastically encouraging answer to prayer! The other night was 18th January 1984, when I received a call, having got home after the prayer meeting, from a church wanting to give £1,500. No-one knew these prayer targets except the few people praying in the meetings!

SACO has never been in the red with the bank to the glory of our faithful God. Once, many years later, we needed £1,000 to pay bills and we prayed for the money at the Wednesday prayer meeting and a cheque for £1,000 arrived in the post on the following Saturday morning from Zambia in Africa!...it must have been posted before we prayed and truly illustrates what God says in Isaiah 65:24 "Before they call, I will answer".

There was a dedication rally for the shop and the wider outreach work of SACO on 28th. January and, by God's grace, the shop was paid for by the end of March 1984, a year after the first prayer meeting for the work.

God had not just provided for the work spiritually but also with godly folk committed to trying to reach the Asian community with the gospel. Much seed had been sown by a

retired missionary, who had worked in Pakistan, who distributed Christian magazines door-to-door and a young man who had felt God calling him to run a youth club for local boys in the Asian area and had seen several lads profess faith in Christ, including a Sikh teenager called Kuldeep Rajo who would eventually become the pastor of the Asian Christian Fellowship many years later.

Vincent Nurmahi was a key person in setting up the Asian Christian Fellowship. He had been involved in door-to-door visiting in the Asian area and street evangelism and had called some meetings for Asian Christians in the 1970's but things had not taken off. God arranged it that we met in a conference about Asian evangelism run by OM in Manchester in April 1981, before I even knew that I would eventually come to Southampton to work with Asian people. In typical OM fashion, we were sleeping in sleeping bags on the floor and I ended up sleeping next to Vincent. I remember that he cooked a particularly good curry for all the delegates one evening.

We became friends and he gave me his address and phone number and so when I arrived in Southampton in November 1981, I called him to see if he wanted to go door-to-door visiting. He later said that he had been really discouraged at that point and on the verge of giving up trying to reach the Asian community and that this call came at just the right time. He then committed himself to coming out visiting at least one evening each week which he did faithfully for the next 14 years! I cannot remember Vincent ever being reluctant to go out and tell about the Lord even once in all those years (although I must admit I would often have preferred to do something else) and he had a wonderful smile and friendly, joyful nature. When we started the Asian Christian Fellowship, it was so good to have an older, mature Asian Christian like Vincent (who was 45) working alongside this young English guy.

In Asian culture, men talk to men and women talk to women and so as a single guy, I knew that I needed to pray to God to raise up women with a heart to reach the Asian women. As I began in January 1983 to pray for a shop, I also prayed for this and around this time, God brought two very significant women to Southampton. One was a retired missionary, Brenda Ashton, who had worked as a nurse for over 30 years in southern Africa (mostly Malawi) and now felt a call to work with Asian women, and the other was a young lady called Lavinia Spencer (later Phillips), who had completed a degree in English and Philosophy and had also spent a gap year in Thailand teaching English as a foreign language and who was enthusiastic to use these skills in teaching English to Asian women. We all even ended up living in the same hostel (where Lavinia became the warden) whilst I waited for the accommodation in the shop to be ready and Brenda waited for a housing association flat. Both these ladies befriended many Asian women and had the joy of seeing many come to faith in Christ.

Over the next few years, the shop made many good contacts for the gospel and provided a base near to the main Asian area of the city to which enquirers could come to find out more about Jesus. Much Christian literature was given out in the shop and on door-to-door visiting and many good conversations took place. About 90% of customers were non-Christian English folk although 90% of contacts coming in to talk were Asian. It was a particular joy when people found faith in Christ in the shop (usually English people). Lodgers with an interest in the Asian outreach came and went and the Asian Christian Fellowship slowly grew in depth of discipleship and fellowship, if not much in numbers, and began to meet fortnightly in April 1986. House group Bible studies (as well as many individual Bible studies and visits) and a youth outreach club were added.

Praying for a shop; Round 2

Much to my initial dismay, the council announced plans to build a much-needed dual carriageway near the shop which would effectively cut it off from the Asian area and we found ourselves in January 1987 again praying that God would provide a new shop by August of that year!

In the monthly prayer meeting on 18th February, God spoke with a clear voice in my mind, "Pray for £10,000 in interest-free loans by the end of April." This was very specific and represented a challenge to my faith. We had received some interest-free loans towards the first shop back in 1983/84 but they had only amounted to about £4,000 altogether. If I prayed this prayer, the group of people in the prayer meeting would all witness it. I decided to step out in faith and obey what the Lord had said and I prayed for £10,000 in interest-free loans by the end of April. Kuldip Rajo remembers hearing this in the prayer meeting and wondering about it.

About a month later, on Tuesday 24th March, I was due to go out in the evening to take a Bible study but the wife called to say that her husband was going to be late home from work and so unexpectedly I stayed in. The phone rang and a man said that he was praying about how much he might be able to give us as an interest-free loan towards the purchase of a new shop. He said that he would pray about it and phone back later. I thought that it must be a few hundred pounds at least if he was taking so much time to pray about it.

He phoned back about ten o'clock and said "I think that I can give you £10,000."

I immediately suspected that he had heard something about the February prayer meeting and asked "Has anyone said anything to you about this?"

He said "No, is that a significant amount?"

I knew then that God was at work in this and the next morning I decided to pop in to the shop we had been interested to buy (which was actually one that I had prayed for God to provide when I was looking for the first shop). The owner, however, had said that he was going to sell to someone else and since he was a shrewd negotiator, I decided not to mention the fact that we had come into some more money and I just asked how things were going.

He said, "I don't know. I'm fed-up with these people who were going to buy the shop. They keep messing me about. They've signed a contract but I haven't signed anything and if you met their offer, I'd sell to you."

This really made me think and I spent the whole of that Wednesday afternoon praying to the Lord to confirm if this was the shop that He wanted for the work. The other folk had signed a contract. Was it right to meet their offer?

It came time for the six o'clock news on the television which I always watch and so I switched the TV on. What happened next I will clearly remember all my life. The television came on to show a cartoon of an evil rhinoceros holding a contract and then a racoon ran and snatched it from its hand and gave it to the hero of the story. I had never seen that cartoon series before.

The TV said, "The contract has gone to them.....No, it hasn't, it's gone to you!" and that was all it said and then the music played for the end of the cartoon. I was stood with my finger still on the button. I had just prayed all afternoon for the Lord to show me whether or not this was His shop but I never expected the confirmation to come through the TV!

After this, I was totally convinced that God wanted us to buy this shop and that evening I phoned round our SACO

committee and told them what had happened and we signed the initial contract to buy the shop the next day, Thursday 26th March. The Christian solicitor was astounded and said, "Are you sure that you know what you are doing? You are signing up to buy this shop but you have no-one lined up to buy your present shop. How are you going to pay the money?"

All I could say was that I was convinced that this was God's will and that He would provide. Lloyds bank, however, could not take this assurance and insisted on charging us £50 for assessing us for a bridging loan even though we tried to tell them that we would not need it. Within a week or so, someone who had not seen any estate agent's notice wandered into the shop on a Friday, sent a surveyor friend in at the weekend and offered us the best possible price on the Monday.

There were then delays with the buyer getting his mortgage sorted out and the owner of our new shop selling all his stock and when the contracts were finally exchanged (which was not in our control) for both properties it was on the same day, 31st July.....by August! We also did not need a bridging loan and so Lloyds finally believed us and refunded the £50 charge.

God often shows that He is in control by leaving the answer to prayer until the last moment (like the sea parting for the Israelites when the Egyptian army had caught up with them). Maybe if it happened sooner we would be inclined to think that it would have worked out that way anyway and by letting it go up to the wire, God makes His point that this is not coincidence or serendipity, to say nothing of having so much greater dramatic effect!

This second shop was in an even worse state than the first one had been when we bought it and we built a completely new two-storey extension with new foundations, a new back

wall and shop front, new roof, stairs, doors and windows as well as a new plumbing and heating system and electrical rewiring. All this work was finished in about 4 months and we hurried on with the decoration and shop fittings in order to open in time to sell the Christmas stock which I had again ordered in faith.

The day that I moved into the new shop, after a flurry of hectic last minute activity, was 7th December and we opened on 12th December which, when I looked at my old diary, I realised had been the same days that I had moved into and opened the first shop!

The new shop soon outdid the old one in numbers of customers and at least trebled the turnover immediately. Whenever anyone asked about how the shop came into being, it was a great testimony to the reality of the power of prayer in the name of Jesus. I could say to people that they were literally sitting inside an answer to prayer!



Changed lives

It has been a privilege in SACO to be involved in seeing God change people's lives and bring them into His kingdom. The Christian message is the power of God to forgive the past and transform someone's whole being and future. Jesus died to deal with all the things that keep us from God and is alive today to send His Spirit into the heart of anyone who invites Him in simple faith to take control of their life.

Many have found that they were never the same again after they prayed a simple prayer to ask Jesus Christ to forgive them and take over their life with all its problems, whether they were gambling, lust, pride or just plain selfish living. Whatever the religious background, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian or none at all, the transformation has been the same. These are extracts of some of their stories from the early years.

From Islam to Christ

Sometime early in 1983, a local teacher was faced with one of his teenage Pakistani Muslim pupils saying that she was in complete despair because her father wanted to force her into a marriage that she did not want. She had left home and was living with her mother who had previously divorced her father. Not knowing how best to advise the family, he asked one of our shop helpers to visit the mother and her daughter.

When he arrived, the lady somehow got the idea that he was a social worker and as they chatted over a cup of tea, she was wondering why this social worker kept talking about Jesus. She had been brought up Catholic in her childhood in India before converting to Islam when getting married and now the Gospel message of a loving God sending Jesus to save the world began to take root in her heart. Very soon she gave her life to Christ and so did her daughter and the shop helper continued to visit and take Bible studies and build them up in their new faith in Jesus.

After some time the mother asked me to visit her step-son who was a waiter in a restaurant near to our outreach shop. When I did this, in June 1985, I discovered a young man who had been involved in a strict Islamic group or Jamaat on visits to the North-West frontier of Pakistan and who had a very good knowledge of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, and the traditions of the Hadith. Other Muslims used to come and ask him questions about Islam and his family were well respected in the local Muslim community. His father had been involved in starting the first mosque in Southampton and he had helped in the building work.

We started to meet each week for long discussions about spiritual things and this soon developed into a lasting friendship. I would arrive at the restaurant between 7:00pm and 8:00pm when there were few customers and we would sit with the other waiters and talk about world affairs, history, politics and religion and anything else that came up and play a bit of chess in the quieter periods! Customers would start to arrive in numbers when the pubs were shutting between 10:00pm and 11:00pm and then I would usually leave although if the conversation or chess was particularly riveting, they would persuade me to stay on till the restaurant closed at 2:00am. Because I had lived a year and a half in India learning

the culture and could speak a bit of Urdu, I naturally reverted to sub-continent English and body language when I was sitting with these Pakistani and Bengali waiters. Sometimes I was taken for a light-skinned Pushtun from the North-West Frontier of Pakistan. It was a long time before there was any resolution to our discussions. I'll let him describe it in his own words;

"I met with that Christian every week for about two years. I was hoping for him to become a Muslim. On one hand I was conveying the message of Islam but on the other hand I wasn't totally following the laws of Islam because of my job as a waiter, handling alcohol and non-Halal food, and my lack of discipline in praying five times a day. I had also started gambling and various other sinful things.

Looking back on those years, I could say that I was at war with my conscience, wanting to do what was right but not doing it. Though I was about 24 years old, sometimes my way of thinking would be quite immature and I would only hear what appealed to my own biased opinion where Christianity was concerned. During this period of discussion, there were often many questions lingering in my mind at night.

According to both the Quran and the Bible, Abraham was promised a son and heir whose descendants would bless the earth and through whom the final prophet would be born. Abraham had two sons; Ishmael who was the ancestor of the Arabs (and therefore of Muhammad who was an Arab) and Isaac who was the ancestor of the Jews.

I used to argue the Muslim belief that Ishmael was the son of Allah's promise to Abraham and not Isaac, but looking at the Bible, I could not get away from the fact that there was a link between Isaac and all the Jewish prophets and Jesus who were descended from him. It was Isaac who had more of a miraculous birth than Ishmael because he was born of

Abraham's wife Sarah when, according to both the Quran and the Bible, she was ninety years old whilst Ishmael was born of Abraham's maid Hagar who was much younger. If Ishmael, who was born first, was the promised son then there would have been no need for a miracle to produce a second son Isaac.

Having been reading the Bible, Jesus came across as someone more than a prophet when it came to miracles. He told the lame to get up and walk, He made the blind to see, He raised the dead to life, fed five thousand people with a few loaves and fish, walked on water, spoke with authority about the forgiveness of sins and He did not say "God says" but "I say to you".

Jesus was always said to be Al Masih, the Messiah, in the Quran but it did not explain what that meant and neither did the commentaries. I discovered from the Bible that the Messiah was someone promised to the Jews who would be a Jewish king who would rule the world forever. This was a very different view of Jesus than I was used to. Together with his miracles, Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies in the Old Testament (Torah and Zabur) regarding the coming of the Messiah; being born in Bethlehem, entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, being betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, cleansing the temple of traders and literally hundreds of others.

When I thought about the justice of God, I could not understand how Allah could be just if the Quran stated that it was up to Him whether to condemn or reward a person regardless of their sin or righteousness, for example He could send a righteous man to Hell if He wanted or a terrible sinner to Paradise if He wanted. How could that be just?

Also the Muslim belief that anything good comes from Allah and everything bad comes from Allah also troubled me. If we say that Allah is loving and good, which no Muslim will deny, then how can He give something which is bad? This especially

applies to the teaching that predestined bad things including even adultery, murder etc., cannot be escaped no matter how hard men may run or try to get away. This also is not just or kind and so it appeared that Islamic teaching makes Allah seem to be unjust. In contrast to the Quran, the Bible states that God is love and that there is no evil in Him and no evil can come from Him. He is so pure that evil cannot exist in His presence in Heaven.

All this was making me question my Muslim background but for a long time, the main thing which was holding me back from becoming a Christian was the Bible's statements that Jesus is God. Most of these talks would play on my mind and I would try to block out some of the thoughts which seemed blasphemous to my Muslim beliefs. Somehow I came to the belief that what I needed to do was to open my mind to God and let Him show me the right way. It was at this point that I put away my biased leaning towards the teaching of Islam and tried to look at things from a fair and open perspective.

A change began to take place within my heart. I could see my body as a robot-like device within which I sat operating all my faculties and in the same way, I could see Jesus as a person with God sitting inside operating Him. The Muslim belief that God is everywhere would mean that He could be in Heaven at the same time that He was in Jesus. This also helped me to understand how Jesus could pray to God the Father in Heaven.

I also knew that I could not get to Heaven through my own efforts and I began to look more seriously into what the Bible said someone must do to get right with God and when I learnt about the need for a personal relationship with God, I knew that was what I needed.

In the Bible, Jesus says "I am the way, the truth and the life; no-one comes to the Father except through me". It says

that anyone who believes in Him, trusting their life into His hands for their forgiveness and to be saved on the Day of Judgement through His death on the cross for their sins and giving themselves into His control would be saved and forgiven and given eternal life, receiving God's Holy Spirit into their hearts. I finally decided to trust Jesus in this way in 1987 and this began a change in my life which is still going on and the gambling and other bad things gradually declined.

For a time I kept my new beliefs and the fact that I had trusted in Jesus a secret due to the reaction that I expected from my family. While working in the restaurant, many people would come from the mosque to talk to us about revitalising our Muslim faith and I would put questions to them and have discussions without letting on that I was a Christian. They would give me half-hearted answers which I knew full well that they themselves did not understand and after many such visits from strangers and people known to me, I felt that it was about time that I declared my faith in the open.

During this time, I prayed that the Lord would give me strength and create the right opportunity in which I could declare my faith. I also prayed that He would control the consequences of this and that I would have the right words to say when questioned.

Once I told a close friend, who in turn informed my father, the first few weeks were rather intensive for me. One evening, my father rang my flat to ask me if what he had heard in regard to me becoming a Christian was true. I admitted to him that it was true and that it was not an easy decision for me to declare it openly. At this he became very, very angry to the extent of disowning me.

Certain friends came to my home and begged me to become a Muslim again. They were crying at my doorstep and offered

to give me all their wealth and possessions if I would only return to Islam. Many relatives urged me that I should simply say that I was still a Muslim. In reply I told them that even if I did that verbally then I would be a hypocrite because in my heart I truly believed that Jesus had died for me and that He was the only way to God. I asked those who came to me that if I came back to Islam could they guarantee me a place in Paradise and they said "if God is willing", but with Jesus I have an assured place in Heaven because He paid the price for my sins."

The remarkable change that took place in his life was a strong witness to his friends and the whole community of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ and one of them said to me later "I don't agree with what he did in leaving Islam but it has done him good". Later on his wife also joined him in following Jesus.

Don't have a fit

On 30th September 1985, a young Tamil from Sri Lanka came to Southampton to study. He was under medication for epilepsy as he was prone to epileptic fits when he was sleeping. As a strong Hindu, he had sought healing in Sri Lanka even by rolling around a Hindu temple but it had not worked.

I met him at a student hostel when I visited a Muslim student who was sharing his room. He advised the Muslim student not to have anything to do with this Christian man but we happened to meet again at a Christian student meeting. I asked him what his god had done for him and he was really challenged by this question. This is what happened next in his words.

"I never wanted to give up my faith or my Hindu caste but on 18th March 1986 at about 6pm, I had the first and last epileptic fit that occurred whilst I was awake. I was on the street, far away from my country and my parents, when I felt

it coming on. I grabbed a lamp-post to avoid falling into the road under the cars and hit my head against it hard. When I woke up, I was on the pavement with my head covered in blood. Somehow I returned to my hostel and people tried to comfort me but a group of Christian students along with the warden prayed for me.

That was the turning point for me and I decided to go to church with the hope of healing. I had been to so many churches before in Southampton but I hadn't opened my heart. Vincent Nurmahi and Sukesh Pabari came with my Christian friend to see me and this reassured me that Asian people like me could become Christians as Sukesh was also from Hindu background.

One day shortly after, I went to a meeting where the preacher told me that I needed to accept Jesus as my Lord and Saviour to be healed of my sickness and with my whole heart I decided to follow Christ. This was 23rd March 1986 but I was disturbed by another attack in my sleep (I never had another one whilst awake) within a month. My Christian friend gave me a Tamil Bible and comforted me with the words of Romans 8:28 that God will somehow bring good out of everything that happens to those who follow Him. I started to go to the Asian Christian Fellowship and came closer to God there and later, I moved to London where I was baptised on 1st May 1987".

In his testimony at his baptism, he said that going to the Asian Christian Fellowship had been a major factor in convincing him that Christianity could work for Asian people and this was one of the main reasons for setting up an Asian Christian Fellowship where believers from the subcontinent background could worship Christ and fellowship and encourage one another within their own cultural setting. It has always been a major witness to visiting non-Christian

Asians (who have been present in almost every service we have ever had) that Christianity is not just a Western religion. In order not to isolate the Asian Christians from other believers, we held our meetings in the afternoon enabling them to attend other church services also.

He started preaching visits to Sri Lanka and set up a registered charity to help the needy there in January 2000. In September 2006, he started a Tamil Christian Fellowship near his home with the help of a local Baptist church and he has gone 10 years without suffering an epileptic fit!

Krishna or Christ?

In January 1986, a house group was started for younger Asian Christians mostly in their 20's. This became quite popular and slowly drew in new members. This is the story of one of them.

"I was brought up as a Hindu as all of my family are from Gujarati Hindu background but my husband was a Christian. I used to go to church with my husband from time to time but after I left the church each time that was that. I would go home and the next morning, I would pray to my god, Lord Krishna. Each morning, before I went to work, I would read the Gita, the Hindu holy book.

One day some Christian friends came to visit us at home and asked us if we would like to go to the Bible study they usually held every two weeks on Fridays. We went along in May 1988 and talked about different sections from the Bible and then had a question time at the end of the meetings. As I was more and more curious each time, I started asking questions about anything I didn't understand and then I would compare Hinduism and Christianity. I was so confused about which god I should believe in and pray to and it was at the back of

my mind, cross-examining Hinduism and Christianity, each day.

So I started searching for God and I decided to pray to my true Creator. I prayed really hard each day saying "Whoever created me, please answer my prayer and let me know who I should believe in". Then one day I felt the spirit saying to me, "I am the Way, I'm the one who created you". I felt the presence of Jesus and I didn't feel any presence of Lord Krishna. I thought to myself, I've been praying all these years to Lord Krishna and when I was confused and needed him why didn't he come forward and say "I am the one you should believe in" ? At this point I realised that Jesus was the one I should believe in.

The next morning I got up and went to my little prayer room to read the Gita, hoping that Lord Krishna would answer my prayer. So I picked up the Gita to read but I felt the Spirit saying, "Why are you reading this book? What are you doing here? I'm your Creator!" I felt as if it was Jesus saying this so I put the Gita down and just walked out of the room. This happened for a few days. During the daytime whenever I was doing housework, I thought about Jesus. He was on my conscience all the time.

Then on Friday November 18th, 1988, I went to the Bible study again as usual. As the meeting progressed, I felt under conviction, a feeling of heaviness and burden, that I really needed Jesus in my life. I felt that I wanted to know Jesus as I realised He is the only way to God and I was born again on that day. Since then I have sensed and felt God's peace within myself. This peace no-one else can give and Christianity affects every aspect of my life."

Shortly after committing her life to Jesus, she wanted to get rid of all her Hindu books and idols and so she offered them to

her sister who said "Why should I have them if they are not good enough for you?" and asked her what had happened to make her give up her Hindu beliefs. When she heard how Jesus had changed her sister's life, she decided to follow Him too. It has often been the case that when family members have seen the change that faith in Jesus has brought to a relative's life that they want to experience that change for themselves also. The witness of a life truly changed by God will affect those who know us best the most.

Two steps forward, one step back

Blank

Whenever we seek to follow the Lord and do His will there will be opposition, setbacks, trials and difficulties amidst the joys and triumphs of His grace. We see this time and again in Scripture, whether with Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem or Paul preaching the Gospel in the towns of the eastern Mediterranean, and the work of SACO has been no exception.

We can learn positive lessons in these times and they can alert us to spiritual dangers and spur us on to new levels of trust and growth in the Lord. Many times when people have asked me how the work is going, I've replied "Two steps forward, one step back" but God always has a plan to bless and build His Kingdom and at least that represents a net gain!

Help needed

With the opening of the second shop in December 1987, the workload in SACO greatly increased as the level of sales more than trebled those of the first shop. This involved more time and effort being put into ordering and restocking the shelves especially in the four months leading up to Christmas when sales would peak. Ordering the Christmas stock actually began in August.

The Asian Christian Fellowship had already been meeting fortnightly since April 1986 and there was enthusiasm for moving on to weekly meetings. It was fulfilling the role of providing a venue for Asian believers to worship and fellowship together within their own cultural context and those who came regularly were eager to have more opportunities to meet together.

I soon realised early in the run-up to Christmas 1988 that I needed more help in the work. We had excellent voluntary shop helpers and more of the Asian Christians were getting involved in preaching in the meetings and in visiting contacts and door-to-door but it was still too much for one full-time worker. So I started to pray that God would raise up someone to work alongside me and I specifically prayed for a married (as I was single and he could then do any marriage counselling!) British Asian Christian who would be gifted in preaching, evangelism and pastoral care and who could be trained up to take over eventually as the main pastor in the Asian Christian Fellowship (as I had always prayed that an Asian person would take this role). I also prayed that this person would be able to start work by September 1989 in time to help in stocking the shop for the Christmas rush in the following year.

Within a few weeks, Kuldip Rajo, a long-standing married Punjabi believer from Sikh background, came to me and said that he was fed-up with the rat race and that, as he was going to be 30 soon, he could see life going by and he wanted to spend it doing something that would last forever. He was a rising executive in what was then the Midland Bank and was one of those in charge of their national pension sales and I knew that he had a heart to serve the Lord as he had already done much evangelistic and pastoral visiting, had run a boys' youth club and had begun taking a turn in preaching in the Asian Christian Fellowship.

When I asked him how soon he could leave the bank, he said that he had a project that he would have to finish that would take him till next July and that if he then took a break in August, next September would be the earliest! When he said this, I felt God's confirmation that this was to be my future co-worker.

Christmas 1988 was very hectic in the shop with four people required on duty on the Saturdays before Christmas to deal with the volume of customers (I spent the time just dealing with enquiries and restocking the shelves!) and with organising full evenings of carol singing in different homes till late at night one weekend before Christmas, it was no wonder that I ended up with a bad head-ache (which I otherwise never get by God's grace) on Christmas Day.

In January 1989, we began to meet weekly as an Asian Christian Fellowship with me teaching or leading at least every other week and in July 1989, Brenda Ashton felt it was time to step back from the work at the age of 73. Brenda had been greatly used by God in seeing various Asian ladies come to faith in the Lord, taking many individual Bible studies, a fortnightly study with the Asian Christian Fellowship teenagers and also in covering a third of the time in the shop since the opening of the first shop 6 years before. She would be greatly missed and it was looking even more necessary for a co-worker to join SACO.

After much prayer and seeking the Lord, it was a great joy to welcome Kuldip Rajo into the work in September 1989 just at the time that I had prayed about. Kuldip had become a Christian from Sikh background in his teens and as a local lad who had lived in Southampton almost all his life, he already knew lots of Asian folk in the community. He soon started to see people turning to put their faith in Christ and this represented a great step forward in the ministry of SACO.

In the same month of September, Sukesh Pabari, a believer from Gujarati Hindu background left the Fellowship to join Interserve (later known as Urban Vision) as a full-time worker amongst Asians in Bristol (he later moved on to serve the Lord in Nairobi, Kenya). It was great to see these young guys stepping out in faith to serve God.

One a month

At the turn of the decade, I spent time seeking God in prayer and fasting for His way forward for the work and He laid it on my heart that we should begin to pray for at least one Asian person per month to come to faith in Christ. This represented a very challenging prayer target as I had previously worked a whole year in Coventry without seeing even one.

In the monthly prayer meeting on 17th January 1990, we first prayed for this target and on the following Sunday morning, two Iranians, whom I had never met before, came and sat next to me in Portswood Church. As we started to sing the first hymn, tears came into my eyes and I just spent the whole service praying for them. The sermon was on how to evangelise and I was wondering what they would make of it. After the service ended, one of them turned to me and said "What is evangelism?", and this gave me the opportunity to tell him that it meant sharing the gospel and to explain what the gospel message of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. Both of them went home and gave their lives to Christ later that day!

Within about a week of our prayer meeting, there were 5 Asian folk who had professed faith in Christ! Once again God had answered prayer and had given us a strong encouragement right from the start to continue to seek Him for this target of people coming to Christ.

In the next weeks, God put us in touch with two Tamil ladies from Roman Catholic background. One of them was quite seriously ill with a disease that caused paralysis and was put in a hospital bed next to a Christian lady. They got talking and the Tamil lady said that she wished that someone could go and pray with her mother at home who was worried about her. The Christian lady said that she knew of an Indian Christian worker, Kuldip, and that she could ask him to go and pray for her. The Tamil lady agreed.

Meanwhile her mother was so worried about her that she phoned a Christian that she had known back in Sri Lanka to ask her to pray. The lady in Sri Lanka said "Why don't you ask God to send someone there to pray for your daughter?" She agreed and after putting the phone down she prayed for God to send someone. About 15 minutes later, the doorbell rang and there was Kuldip introducing himself and asking if she would like him to pray with her for her daughter!

When her daughter was well enough to come out of hospital, we visited them and they both gave their lives to Christ on 27th February. 1990 was to become the year that we saw the greatest number of people putting their trust in the Lord through the work at that time. God had put it on my heart for us to pray for at least one Asian per month to find salvation in Jesus and He was glorifying His name by answering our prayers. This was another huge step forward in His work.

Addicted to gambling

It was a real joy to see God saving people from all kinds of troubles and one day in October 1990, I was asked by a Sikh family to come and see their son because his life was in such a mess and they did not know what to do about it. They had heard that Christians had a message and a power that could change lives. I sat next to this young man on their sofa and they said "Can you do anything for this boy?"

“I can’t do anything but Jesus can if he will trust in Him” I replied. This is his story in his own words.

“I was born in 1968 and brought up in a Bhatra Sikh family. I started work when I was 11 doing markets for 12 hours on Saturdays earning £5 per day. I got used to having too much money at that age and this led me into gambling. When I was 14 and 15 years old, I would spend £40-£50 a day in arcade machines. If I won the jackpot, I would just put the money back into the machines.

At 15, I was beginning to steal money to gamble and at 16, I left school and started a family business working in the markets and a shop. I used to buy and sell stolen goods and steal money from the business. I envied people who were rich and was proud of my stealing and would lie all the time. I started to bet on horses.

When I was 17, I started working as a hospital porter but gambled all my wages away. I got a loan of £2,500 from the bank by lying about starting a business and immediately lost £800 in gambling. Then at 18, I got into a relationship with an English girlfriend but I was really only interested in her money and my own needs. I bought a greyhound for £1,000 and started to go to meetings.

My Mum and Dad bought me a house which we let to students and I used the mortgage money for gambling without them knowing. I got another loan of £1,500 by lying again and I was in debt up to about £4,500 but it didn’t bother me. Even in the toilet I was reading the racing results.

My parents wanted to arrange my marriage and said that I would need some money. This is when they discovered that my bank account was empty and that I had got into debt through gambling. I felt totally disgraced and used to walk

the streets till 3 or 4am because I couldn’t find any peace. All enjoyment was gone but I kept all the pain and agony inside me.

I decided to buy two guns to do hold ups in order to get some money but I thank God that I never used them. I had thought that if I got caught, I would just have to kill myself. I started to seriously consider suicide.

There were endless arguments within the family but I still got married at the age of 21. My parents paid for everything. I didn’t want to get married but did so to keep my parents happy. I was still in the relationship with my English girlfriend and this went on after the marriage as well. I had no time for my wife and used to come home from work and go straight out again. If she tried to make me stay at home, I would hit her.

My house was nearly repossessed when a letter came from the building society saying that £5,000 was required within 7 days for the mortgage. My older brother was really shocked when he read the letter but the family paid the debt.

I used to go to Gamblers’ Anonymous to try to get rid of my addiction and the leader there helped me with the building society in court by saying that I had an addiction and needed help. The case was adjourned.

My family got so desperate that they asked a Christian minister to come and pray for me. He said to me that I must turn from my way of life and put my trust in Jesus Christ for His forgiveness and ask Him to take over my life and change me. I was so desperate that I prayed to Jesus in the only way I understood at the time.

Even then I didn’t want to talk to the Christian minister too much because I still had my own schemes set up. I was still gambling and most of the time I went out when he was due to

come round. I was only showing him one card out of a pack of 52 because I felt I couldn't trust anyone.

When the hearing came for the repossession, I asked for prayer for it and the court allowed the money to be repaid over a longer time. This answer to prayer, however, still didn't really change me and I carried on gambling.

I got baptised as a Christian in February 1991 but I was still holding back on a total reliance on God for my finances and for my life. There had been some change in me but not enough to finish the gambling for good. Consequently, I drifted away from God about 3 months after my baptism back into gambling and adultery and this lasted for almost 2 years until I had a bad car crash in 1993 due to an epileptic fit.

The car swerved off the road and mounted the pavement, just missing a man by the side of the road and some people by a bus stop. It nearly went through a shop window but stopped just short. Although I was not wearing a seat belt, I had no cuts, bruises or whiplash and no-one else was hurt. I saw this as a real miracle!

Two weeks later, I was reading the Bible by myself and a verse really spoke to me. It said "Stop sinning before something worse happens to you". This really gripped me. I said to God that I could not stop my gambling and adultery and that He would have to help me stop. This was at 3am on a Friday night and on the Saturday, my English girlfriend phoned me asking me out. I refused because I had some relatives coming down. She agreed but was very disappointed.

On Sunday morning, she phoned again, crying and saying that she wanted to talk to me. I was confused as to why she was crying and I said that I would meet her that evening. When we met down the pub, she explained that she had met another

man the night before. At first my heart sank and I tried for a week to get her back but then I was happy that at last the relationship was broken and I could see that God had done it.

After that I started to stay home and there was a change in me. I actually started to enjoy knowing and serving God. I began to go to Bible studies, prayer meetings and church on Sundays again. I was really hungry and thirsty to know more of God and of course all the gambling stopped.

During this time, God gave me a vision of Jesus on a shining white horse with a sword chasing idols away which I later found out was to be found in the book of Revelation in the Bible. It really touched me that God would share this with me even though I had done so much wrong. He showed me how much He loves me and how He has forgiven me through Jesus and this has helped me to love and accept myself. He has helped me to grow and trust Him in faith in areas where I was once unable to do anything. Now I love talking about and praising Jesus Christ's name and I want to serve God and tell everyone about the Good News of Jesus".

About a month after this young man prayed to commit his life to Christ in the only way he knew how at the time, his brother-in-law and sister quite independently made their own first steps of faith in the Lord Jesus and when she started to see a change in her husband for the better, his wife also gave her life to Christ. Many years after this in 1997, she felt God telling her that they would have a son in 1999 (they already had two lovely daughters) and 4 weeks later as her husband was flicking through the Bible, he came across the name Simeon and felt that this should be the boy's name.

In April 1999, they asked to renew their marriage vows to celebrate their 9th wedding anniversary and to thank God for how He had saved them from so much trouble in their early

married life. There was hardly a dry eye in the congregation as it was shared how following Jesus had changed them. From a loveless arranged marriage, they now obviously loved each other very deeply.

Unknown to them at the time, they were expecting and a son was born on 15th December 1999 whom they called Simeon. They were surprised to learn that Simeon in the Bible was a son given to Jacob's wife Leah because she had not been loved as they had no idea of this until after he was born!

We had covered every Asian home in Southampton with door-to-door visiting several times by 1990 distributing at least a tract in the different Asian languages and books or magazines to those who showed more interest and in 1990, we worked with churches in Portsmouth to visit the Asian homes there and in 1991, we covered the nearby town of Eastleigh similarly.

1991 was another good year with at least one Asian person per month professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but after that there followed 4 years, 1992-1995, when it was touch and go whether that target was really reached or not.

A step back

The shop started a sustained fall in sales and customers in 1991 due to a decline in the street where it was situated. Bus routes had been altered so that buses no longer stopped in the street and this led to a drop in numbers of visitors and falling sales that led to shops closing. Fewer shops meant even less visitors would come to the street and so a spiral of decline set in. God still provided for His work, however, since as sales declined, giving to SACO increased and we never went into the red by God's grace.

Several members of the Asian Christian Fellowship had severe difficulties with their faith in this period and some, even

potential future leaders, drifted away from following God completely. Discontent, disunity, misunderstanding and even outright sin occurred so badly that 3 different individuals had to be asked not to attend the meetings.

Marriages were coming under pressure and 3 ended in divorce. Then in the second half of 1993, just after celebrating the 10th anniversary of the work, we went 6 months without seeing anyone professing faith in the Lord at all. All of this represented a big step back in the work.

In January 1994, after much prayer and working and training alongside me for over 4 years, we decided that it was the right time for Kuldip to take over as the main pastor of the Asian Christian Fellowship (which was something we had always been aiming for) freeing me up to travel around the country a bit working with Operation Mobilisation, the Evangelical Alliance and the Alliance of Asian Christians promoting Christian work amongst Asian people.

As Kuldip took over from me praying with someone who had been working alongside SACO, he sensed that something was wrong and challenged him about what it was. He discovered that he had been having an adulterous affair with one of the few believers to have found faith in the Lord in 1993. When he refused to stop and so was excluded from the Asian Christian Fellowship, the trickle of people finding faith resumed. Sin in the camp can limit how God will bless the whole community as when Achan sinned by keeping things for himself that should have been devoted to the Lord and Joshua's whole Israelite army was defeated.

For about 8 months in 1995, I was wondering and praying whether my work around the country would be better served by moving to a more central location in Coventry (as the work in Southampton was now quite established) but whilst I was

spending time in Coventry in September that year praying for God's guidance as to what I should do, I had the news that Vincent Nurmahi, a key elder in the Asian Christian Fellowship, had had a stroke. I concluded that this was not the time at which God would have me leave Southampton.

In addition to everything else, there was a cloud gathering on my own personal horizon that would change everything for me too.

4

Big change, big battle, big test

One of my favourite Bible verses has always been Romans 8:28 " We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose". It had been a verse that I had memorised and meditated on a lot but sometimes, when life's path takes a turn for the worse and we find ourselves in difficulties, it takes a lot of faith to believe it.

In such times, we find ourselves faced with a choice. We can either blame God for our troubles and end up becoming bitter and disillusioned or we can choose to run to Him for comfort and strength to endure and trust that He knows best and that He will bring something good out of it all even when that seems most unlikely.

A pain in the neck

For years I had found increasing trouble in controlling my neck. It started around 1982 with an occasional tremor which I dismissed but as the years went by, this escalated very slowly (any change only being noticeable over a two year period or so) and a pressure to turn to the right developed. I had to constantly fight this but I just persevered not knowing what it was and hoping that it would just go away.

In the early 90's, however, it worsened into jerky spasms which became increasingly difficult to counteract. Public speaking became a trial as I had to concentrate more and more on how to keep my head still and it felt like trying to juggle whilst preaching. The muscles that turned my head to the right were becoming stronger through all the exercise they were getting and eventually the only way that I could get my head to straighten again was to push it back into place by pushing against my nose. Everyone assumed that I had developed some kind of nervous habit of touching my nose!

In 1993, I went to my GP who ordered all kinds of tests including X-rays. He concluded that it was not stress, Parkinson's disease or anything wrong with the muscles but could not diagnose the real problem and so sent me away hoping that it might clear itself up. It got inexorably worse so that by Christmas 1995, I could no longer eat with a knife and fork but had to hold my head still with one hand whilst eating in order to get the food safely into my mouth. This time the GP referred me to a hospital specialist.

As I spent time in prayer and fasting at the turn of the year, God spoke into my mind very clearly the words "Big change, big battle, big test" for the coming year and on 4th January 1996, I saw the specialist who diagnosed my problem as I entered the door. Apparently I had classic symptoms of spasmodic torticollis, a form of dystonia, which neither I nor anyone I knew had ever heard of. He explained that a chemical malfunction in the motor-control centre in the brain was causing faulty signals to be sent to the neck muscles resulting in spasmodic cramps. In time-honoured tradition he said; "There's good news and bad news. The good news is that it won't result in paralysis or affect your mind the way that Parkinson's disease eventually does but the bad news is that it's progressive and we don't yet have a cure".

It was a relief finally to know what was wrong with me (especially that it was not a brain tumour or the first signs of madness!) but a shock that I could have an incurable, progressive disease. It is the sort of thing that somehow always happens to someone else and I wondered what it would mean for my future ministry. How could God let me become so ill whilst I was serving Him? How quickly would it progress? I was already becoming limited in what I could do. These questions drove me to seek God more.

At first, the specialist prescribed drugs to alleviate the symptoms and these worked well, although resulting in a lot of drowsiness, for the first 5 months of the year enabling me to more or less carry on with my work but in June, things rapidly deteriorated as I seemed to become used to the drugs and the symptoms returned worse than ever. I needed higher and higher doses to achieve the same effect and at one point they tried drugs that caused me to black out and lose my short-term memory.

As the spasms increased in frequency and intensity, they started to become painful and by November 1996, I could hardly ever straighten my head at all as it was more or less permanently turned around to the right. I was in constant pain and every slight movement would result in agonising cramps. The spasms continued day and night, even when I was asleep, and I would have to sleep on my right side, waking up with static in my hair and my eye swollen from being pushed into the pillow all night. I used to long for just 5 minutes peace from the constant spasms. Things seemed to be getting steadily worse and if it had not been for my Christian faith that God was in this and would somehow bring good out of it, I would definitely have taken steps to end it.

The doctors were worried by this rapid worsening and sent me for a scan to check that it wasn't a brain tumour after all

and made an appointment for me to see one of the top authorities on dystonia in the world at London. At this time, I resigned from all my commitments in the work that I had been doing around the country since 1994. I had not been able to preach in the Asian Christian Fellowship for more than 6 months and I could see that I would have to give up managing the shop as I could no longer unpack and handle the stock.

Just in time

This indeed had become a big change in my life making it impossible to continue with most of the ministry that I had been involved in. All this gave me a lot of time to seek the Lord and pray, however, and I actually felt myself coming closer to God through all the suffering. It surely had been God's timing to hand over to Kuldip as the main pastor in the Asian Christian Fellowship in January 1994 as he had 2 years of settling in before everything in the work landed on his plate when I was put out of action.

I could not go out to share the gospel any more and I began to pray about ways that I could still tell people about Jesus. Some years earlier, local Muslims had seen our shop and set up a similar Muslim outreach shop nearby. Recently they had moved to rent the premises right across the road from our shop and had started to put notices in their window about how Islam was better than Christianity and so I put newspaper clippings about the Taliban and the gospel in our shop window. I did not care any more even if I got a stone through the window!

I got a note through the door from the manager of the Muslim shop saying that not all Muslims were like the Taliban and giving his telephone number. I phoned him and it turned out that he was an elderly Welshman in his 70's who had become a Muslim about 50 years earlier whilst in the British army in Oman in Arabia. He had previously preached in just

about every mosque in Britain to raise money for Islamic Relief and was on the local committee. We agreed to meet and he came over to visit. He later said that he had really hated me at this point.

It turned out that he was becoming ill, however, and so we had something in common and sometime later, one of our shop helpers saw him passing by the shop seemingly in pain and invited him in for a cup of tea. As we sat talking, he said that he was going to have to go into hospital over Christmas in South Wales for tests and then he said;

"If they ask me in hospital what religion I am, I'm not going to say Muslim; these Muslims don't care about you".

I was very surprised to hear him say this as although we had been sharing the gospel with him, he had not seemed to be responding. I prayed as to what I should say and said; "Well, in your youth, you must have heard the story of the prodigal son. God will always have you back".

There were tears in his eyes and I ended up giving him a New Testament and a leaflet that explained the gospel. Those of us in the shop who knew him assured him that we would pray for him over Christmas and I asked Sukesh Pabari who was then working in Bristol to visit him in hospital. He listened to Sukesh but was still struggling with the whole idea of Jesus being God and Sukesh arranged for others from Cardiff to visit also, including an Iraqi Christian. This man had been a high official in the Iraqi government and his witness to the Truth about Jesus had a great effect on him. He had become a Muslim in the Middle East and it was through a man from that region that he found faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

Meanwhile the London specialist had recommended starting injections of botulinus toxin (botox) instead of the

tablets in the New Year and when I heard the date of the first appointment, I was extremely encouraged. God had said “Big change, big battle, big test” for the year. I had been diagnosed on 4th January 1996 and I was due to have the first botox injections on 6th January 1997. This would represent the completion of the year and I felt that it was really going to work. I wrote “Get better” in my diary on 1st January 1997 as I was so sure that this is what the Lord had planned.

Within days of the first injections, the pain had reduced by over 80% and I could start to straighten my head again and this marked the beginning of a very real recovery and slow return over years to a more normal lifestyle. We had to experiment with the exact dosages, positioning and timing of the injections to get them just right but they obviously worked much better than the drugs.

As I was getting better, the manager of the Muslim shop was getting worse having been diagnosed with terminal bowel cancer and after his return to Southampton, we didn’t see him for a few weeks and he didn’t reply to notes that I put through his door. I knew that he was finding it increasingly difficult to walk and so thought that he was just unable to go out and was maybe feeling too unwell to phone up. Another Christian from Muslim background suggested that he might be being kept prisoner if the other Muslims had discovered that he was interested in Christianity but I dismissed this as unlikely in the UK.

Shortly after, I received a phone call from him and he said very quickly, “They’ve found my Bible and hidden it and won’t let me see you or deliver my notes. They’re keeping me prisoner here but I’m going to try to get out to the house of a moderate Muslim man who has said that I can stay with him. I can’t talk any more... the guards are coming” and put the phone down.

He did manage to get himself transferred (as he could hardly walk at all by now and needed constant care) to the moderate Muslim’s house and I started to visit him there but when more fanatical Muslims found out about his Christian faith, they argued with him and again stole the replacement Bible that he had. He became quite distressed about all this and knowing that he was going to die, he expressed the wish that he could die in his homeland of Wales.

The Iraqi Christian, who had visited him in hospital, offered to take him into his home in Cardiff and I arranged a lift for him and his few things to the station. He was cared for in Cardiff as if he was a member of the family and I was able to travel (for the first time any distance out of Southampton since my continuing recovery) to his baptism on 14th June 1997 (exactly a month after the Muslim shop had shut due to the loss of its manager). It was a great joy to see many Christians from Muslim background there and I think that it was the most such folk I had seen in any one place before.

In his testimony, he said “After 74 years of stormy living, I have found a safe haven at last.....People say to me “Oh, you’re dying of cancer” but I say “No, I’m living with cancer” because Jesus has given me eternal life”.

In September 1997, he went to that eternal life with his Lord. This was less than a year after I first met him in November 1996. God had brought him to a saving faith in Jesus just at the very end of his life.

God works for good

If someone had said to me before that the manager of the Muslim shop, who had preached in just about every mosque in Britain, would come to faith in Christ, I would have found it hard to believe, but God did it and the only reason that I met

him was because I put those notices in the shop window and the only reason I did that was because I was so ill! In less than a year he would be dead but we met at just the right time when we had the weakness of illness in common and he was open to God's love in Jesus Christ. God had brought something very good out of all the pain and suffering of the illness, Romans 8:28. That alone would have made it worthwhile but I was later to realise that many other good things came out of that difficult time.

I was much more relaxed in preaching as, after trying to preach when I was finding it a major challenge just to keep my head still, every other concern seemed minor by comparison. Being a shy person by nature, I had hated preaching for the first 20 years of my Christian life (but did it anyway because God had called me to serve Him and people needed to hear the gospel and grow in their Christian lives) but after this it didn't bother me.

God had drawn me nearer to Him as I sought His comfort and strength in the dark times and it felt almost as if I had died and been raised up again to a new and closer walk with Him and He used this to change the direction of what He wanted me to do.

I never went back to travelling around the country as I felt that God's time for that for me was over and I spent more time than ever before just waiting on God in prayer.

Both Kuldip and I felt independently that we as a whole Fellowship should seek God in a week of prayer meetings and fasting at the beginning of January 1998. We didn't realise at the time but God's plans for the work of SACO were going to take another unexpected turn.

A New Dawn

Prayer has always been the bedrock of what we have sought to do in serving the Lord and the monthly prayer meetings continued right from the earliest days. It has been a priority to seek the Lord's guidance and strength in at least one day of prayer and fasting per month and the weeks of prayer and all-night prayer meetings in later years were an extension of this. Jesus said that without Him we could do nothing but gave strong encouragement to seek His will and power.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" contains such amazing promises that it makes prayer a really exciting thing to do. If Jesus was standing in the next room as you read this, saying that He had a blessing to give you, guidance for your future and strength to help you with whatever struggles you face, would you really not bother to go and ask Him for these things? Who knows what God will do through us if we will only seek His will? It was always evident that we had a prayer-answering God and He continued to glorify His name in this way.

Speak and I will do it

On the last night of the week of prayer meetings in January 1998, just after I prayed the closing prayer, God said very clearly

in my mind, "Speak, and whatever you say I will do it". What a promise! And what a responsibility! So I said in my mind, "What shall I speak?" Silence. I began to wonder if I was imagining things but when I opened my eyes, there was a member of the Fellowship standing right in front of me and he said, "Clive, I think that God has just spoken to you and that He wants you to act on it". This was Friday 9th January.

Less than a week later on Thursday 15th January, I was sitting at home with a friend describing the above events at about 10pm when the phone rang. It was two of our Asian Christian Fellowship ladies who had been visiting a Sikh home where they had been asked to pray for a girl with an evil spirit (one of the Christian ladies had recently had a dream of two girls running away from a snake). They said, "Can you come and help us as we haven't been able to cast it out". I had never been involved in anything like that before but I immediately thought of God's promise, which we had just been talking about, to fulfil whatever I spoke.

When we arrived at the house, we found the mother and father really worried about their daughter who was sat down with her head and eyes rolling around. She appeared to be unable to speak but was writing things on a piece of paper without looking at it. The writing said, "My name is Anthony. I'm not going to leave her" amongst other things.

I prayed in Jesus' name for the spirit to leave her but nothing changed and I thought that maybe they did not really know much about who Jesus was and perhaps God wanted me to explain about Him first. So, after explaining to them about Jesus, that He is Almighty God who came into the world to save us from all evil, I tried again.

Remembering what God had promised, I said "You will leave her. In Jesus name, leave her, go and do not come back!"

Immediately, the girl returned to normal and the parents were completely amazed as she had been like that periodically for months and nothing had changed her before. Both the mother and daughter subsequently prayed to give their lives to Christ. God had done a new thing in our work.

We were also very encouraged to hear of a couple who had been with us in the Fellowship and had moved to London, starting an Asian Christian Fellowship called New Life Masih Ghar in Heston with the help of World Harvest Team missionaries. God was giving new initiatives to Kuldip and Lavinia as we had been increasingly aware for a long time of the need for some Christian events to be designed specifically for Asian Christian youngsters and women both of whom were often marginalised from mainstream meetings.

The next generation

The youngsters often fell between two stools culturally and would not particularly feel at home in predominantly English churches or increasingly in traditional Asian Christian Fellowships that kept to the languages and culture of the subcontinent. There needed to be an expression of the Gospel and a living out of the Christian life in the developing mix of Asian British culture that would speak to the younger generation of Asians in Britain. God had been putting all this more and more on Kuldip's heart as he writes;

"On 20th September 1997, I was asked to lead one of the workshops on working with Asian young people at a training day in the Midlands. As one of the sessions was drawing to a close, a group of young Asian guys came on to finish with a few songs they had written. Their music was LOUD but very good.

During the break, with my ears still ringing and my mind excited to have come across talented young Asian Christians, I

started to chat with them to see what churches they attended and what part they played there. I discovered that they mostly attended Asian churches and to my astonishment, they told me that they did not get a look in as far as the worship was concerned (or much else) because the churches preferred the traditional instruments of harmonium and tabla (Indian drums). Consequently, they were not motivated to do anything much in the church.

As I drove alone on the two and a half hours journey home (ears a bit calmer but still ringing), I prayed asking the Lord what could or should be done for Asian young people around the country who were in similar situations. Clive's travels before his illness had revealed much the same picture within the Asian church nationally and meeting these guys and hearing their specific experience turned me to cry out to the Lord.

Furthermore, Clive was scouring the country trying to find a wife for a young believer from Muslim background who was under immense pressure at home to get married. He failed and the young man eventually ended up marrying a Muslim girl. Finding believing partners remains a great need among Asian Christians and is often a cause for backsliding, especially for believers from other faith backgrounds.

As I continued the drive home, I was listening to a Hindi worship song with a line in it which said, "Hum hain Yesu ke nau javan" (meaning "We are Jesus' young people"). I felt that it impressed upon me to do something.

I discussed the thoughts with Clive and we thought that it would be good to approach other Asian Christian leaders around the country to see if we could work together on encouraging young Asian Christians. We set a target in prayer that if nothing resulted from our discussions by November 1997, then reluctantly, we would do something on our own.

Southampton is not the best part of the country from which to launch a national movement!

The few people that we spoke to all agreed that there was a need and that something should be done, but nothing more. One even said that it would cost about £3,000 to put on just one youth event. I felt very disappointed and November soon came and went.

On 16th December 1997, we shared our thoughts with the younger members of the Fellowship and asked for their ideas for a youth event. We decided to hold a day event in Southampton on 25th April 1998, inviting all the people we knew around the country to bring or send their Asian youngsters (aged 16-30) to enjoy a day where they would be the focus. As far as possible, the event would be for the young people by the young people with their own music, testimonies and a Biblical message tailored towards them.

In the weeks leading up to the event, an English lady came into the shop and was thrilled to discover that there was an Asian church in the city as her husband had grown up in Bombay. I shared about our plans for the youth event and she said that her husband would be able to provide all the PA, lights and even smoke machines if wanted just for the cost of repairs for any of the equipment that wasn't working. The total cost of the whole event was £26.44p and we have not spent £3,000 on all the events that we have arranged put together as the Lord has provided venues, food and all the other costs as they have come up!

On the day, about 60 youngsters came from 10 different cities. We knew that the Lord had started something that needed to continue and after discussion with some of the leaders that came, we agreed to have two day events each year, one in London and the other in the Midlands. The aim would be to

inspire, develop and equip young Asian Christians to live for Jesus and the emerging movement would be called naujavan which means youth in Hindi.

At the second event, on 21st November 1998, in West London, held with New Life Masih Ghar, we saw the first person, a young Sikh man, come to faith in Jesus and by God's grace, there have been others who have found faith through naujavan events and many who have made commitments to follow Him. It has been very encouraging to meet many believers, especially from other faith backgrounds, who have said that they have been so blessed to meet other Asian Christians for the first time. Some of them did not even know that other Christians from Muslim, Hindu or Sikh backgrounds existed.

After this there was a period of uncertainty about where to hold the next event. One evening, I received a call from a young man from the Midlands asking for help in finding a Christian believing wife. He had got my number from someone who knew about naujavan and it was unusual as it would generally be a father phoning about finding a partner for his son or daughter. I suggested that he come along to naujavan events and at the end of our lengthy conversation, he offered to ask the elders of his church to host the next event which took place in May 1999. He did receive help in finding a wife and is happily married with two kids (a few others have also found life partners through meeting at naujavan events over the years).

Future venues became easier to find as more and more people wanted to host events in their churches and towards the end of 2005, new younger leaders took over running the growing naujavan movement."

Women's conferences

In 1996, a big group from the Fellowship went to a national day conference for Asian Christian women in London. They were the only ones who attended and this really brought home the need to encourage women generally to be active in the church and to reach out to other women with the gospel. So on 4th July 1998, with support from the women who had organised the London event, we hosted our first women's conference in Southampton attended by 50 Asian Christian women, 20 of whom were from 4 or 5 other cities. Annual events have continued since then and other churches around the country have also hosted these joint women's conferences. Lavinia adds about these conferences;

"The process of organising conferences has given women the opportunity to develop organisational skills and to grow in confidence. A number of women have also grown through leading seminars, preaching, doing small dramas, singing in groups and speaking publicly. Traditionally, Asian women rarely get such opportunities. Tackling the task together has also helped unite the women within the Fellowship since organising and running the conferences has been very much a team effort and valuable links and friendships have also been made between women of various Asian churches and fellowships across the South.

Sometimes women have been challenged by the way other women have endured hardships for their faith and still persevered and personal testimony combined with Biblical preaching has resulted in at least two women coming to faith in Christ during these events. The ministry of praying for one another has played a very significant part in the lives of many and one woman testified to being healed of post-natal depression and loneliness, and miraculously being given a

renewed ability to pray, as a result of being prayed for during the 1998 conference. The women's conferences have helped Asian Christian women to make real progress in advancing the kingdom of God and moving forward into a deeper relationship with God and with each other."

10 years and 10 people

With the popularity of the Alpha course, we decided to run our own outreach course specifically aimed at the questions that younger British Asian people would ask about the Christian faith. The first one began on 22nd September 1998 hosted by a family in which God had already been at work. This is their story;

"I was successful at my teaching work and was promoted and promoted and promoted so that I became Head of Science in 1994. In some respects things were good but in others they weren't and I lost my way and found myself lost in terms of who I was so much that in May 1995, I was in a desperate state with nowhere to turn.

I had made a commitment to Christ 20 years before as a teenager but had drifted away and remained non-committal as to whether I was a Christian or not. Kuldip and others had been visiting me for nearly 5 years, reminding me of God's grace and love, and it was during this desperate time that I turned to Jesus and finally gave in and admitted that I didn't know what was best for me, only God did and I needed Him.

I come from a Hindu family, originally from Fiji, and when I told my Dad that I had turned to Jesus, his first response was "I told you Kuldip was brainwashing you". My wife was also very disappointed in the decision and instead of drawing us together, it became like a wedge that pushed us apart.

My sister, however, was keen to know the truth about Jesus and said that if I could provide her with some historical evidence for the existence of Jesus, she too would turn to Him. I lent her a tape about this but was very surprised when she told me that the historical bit wasn't what led her to Jesus but it was a section on the tape that spoke about Jesus taking our burdens onto Himself.

Having found Jesus, my sister and I were very excited and would return from church on a Sunday afternoon on fire for God. This was not very helpful for my wife and separated us even more but she started to pray to the one and only God to ask whether she was on the right path, and then she had a picture of following a shepherd like a sheep although she had no knowledge of how the Bible describes Jesus as the Good Shepherd. At this time she accepted my wish to be baptised and my sister and I were baptised in June 1996 when there was a prophecy that I would lead many to faith in Jesus.

My wife was searching and we happened to watch a film by Stephen King, called "The Stand", which was about God calling all those who were His towards Himself. My wife heard His call and recognised that she wanted to be His and made a commitment. I recall saying goodbye to her one Monday evening as I left to play football and her saying to me "I've found the Man I love" and I knew that she wanted to share with me that she had found Jesus. Suddenly, she just couldn't stop reading the Bible and she was baptised in November 1996.

My Dad and my brother thought that we'd gone crazy and as far as my brother was concerned, we had "lost the plot". We struggled to share the message with my brother and his partner but God had his own plans and in September 1998, we had a planning meeting for the new outreach course that was going to start in our home. There were 6 of us sitting in our front room, with the curtains open, praying. We were

unaware that my brother and his partner, who would normally have run like the wind at the sight of such an event, were watching us through the window not knowing that we were actually praying for them. They still decided to come in.....which was completely unheard of!

The course, called Zindagi (meaning life in Urdu), started and my brother, his partner and a couple who were close friends of ours as well as several others attended the evenings. As much as my brother fought against coming, he would be there as regular as clockwork and amazingly, both he and his partner and the married couple came to know Jesus.

While all this was going on, my mother had been asking God to show her His way. Unable to read English very well, God was sending her dreams about Him. She was afraid of our Brahmin caste and couldn't tell my father what was going on inside her heart and so she made a secret commitment to the Lord Jesus that only a few of us were aware of. By the end of 1998, there were now 6 of us in the household who professed faith in Jesus!

By 2003, this had risen to 9 as my sister's boyfriend and my brother (who had also professed faith in Jesus many years earlier) and his wife in Canada had also become Christians. The only remaining person was my Dad. I thought that my Dad would never turn away from Hinduism yet in my heart, I felt otherwise.

A close friend had shared with us on numerous occasions pictures that God had given her of our family. Every picture was to do with our unity as a family in Christ and every picture included my Dad.

One Sunday morning in 2004, he phoned me and told me he had made a commitment to Jesus. He was crying on the

phone as he spoke and I went round and found him in an unbelievable state. Jesus had revealed Himself to him and it made him really emotional. He told me what had happened and it struck me that God works in wonderful yet mysterious ways. He knows what will touch us to the core and every so often, He brings us to our knees.

My father had been listening to George Bush on TV who acknowledged that, although he was the most powerful man in the world, he still loved and believed in Jesus. These words were very significant for my Dad as if George Bush could admit to knowing and loving God then so could he.

And there it is--- 10 years and 10 people later---all touched in unique ways by God. If only I could express where some of my family were in terms of God and how He has changed their hearts. Each one is a miracle in itself!"

What a fantastic story and what encouragement to go on praying for our family members who have yet to find Jesus. The Zindagi or Life course continued to be used to see people find a new life in Jesus.

Still one a month

Every year since 1990, we had been praying for at least 12 Asian folk to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ per year (an average of at least one per month) and this had largely been happening with the exception of 1993 as mentioned before. Now at the November prayer meeting in 1998 on 18th November (still on the third Wednesday in the month after 15 years!), we were praying for this target having seen only 6 professions of faith so far that year. A young person asked me "Does that mean that we're going to pray for one person a week for the rest of this year?" and I said "Yes" and that is what we did. God saved more than 6 before the end of the year!

One of these was a Bengali Hindu lady whom we had known almost from the beginning of the work 15 years earlier. She had been searching for peace through Hinduism all that time but eventually found it listening to the testimonies of a young Sikh couple at their Christian baptism on 29th November (when they also dedicated their young children to the Lord Jesus—the first time in the work that an entire family had committed themselves publicly to Jesus). Here is that testimony;

“I am from Sikh background but when I was younger I used to attend Christian youth clubs in the area where I lived. My friends and I used to go just to play the games and we gave the Christian workers there a hard time when it came to listening to any Christian talks.

I went to the Sikh Temple at 6:00pm every day and would sit there until they put the Granth Sahib holy book away for the night. I used to recite the songs and the prayers but I did not understand what they meant. Every night I recited the evening prayers at home as well just before going to sleep.

I got married at the age of 18, then failed my electrical engineering course at college and had some troubled times with my extended family early in my marriage. I got very depressed and was interested when a leaflet advertising a healing meeting was posted through my door.

In those days, a Christian minister used to visit my Dad’s house and so I thought that I would ask him to come along in case I did not understand anything. In the meeting, there was some very lively worship and this seemed very different to the youth club that I had attended. I had been hoping that the meeting would at least give me a laugh to cheer me up.

After the talk, the speaker asked if anyone wanted to come forward to pray to give their life in faith to Jesus and after a

few minutes, I heard a different voice saying, “Open your heart and let me come in”. I believe that this was God’s voice. I ignored it at first but then turned to the minister who had come with me and asked if he had said anything. He hadn’t.

After a few more minutes, I heard the same voice say the same thing again and I replied in my mind, “OK, God, if everything that they say about you is true then I’m in no danger; come into my heart”. As soon as I said that, my heart started to pound as if I was going to have a panic attack, I started to recite the Sikh prayers and I felt very anxious and burdened.

The speaker said, “Is anybody feeling as if they need to get rid of any burdens and be released from something?” This really related to me and I put my hand up and then quickly put it down again.

Then the speaker asked everyone to close their eyes and asked the question again. This time I heard the inner voice say “Come forward” and I stood up to go to the front. My heart was really pounding and I felt as if I was drunk. I went forward and the speaker said, “Pray after me”. I said “I don’t know how to pray” but I prayed after him to trust the Lord Jesus Christ with my life. As soon as I said “Amen”, the burdensome feeling went away and I had a massive smile on my face.

They gave me a Bible and some pamphlets and I went home and told my Dad that I had become a Christian. My Dad said that I had been brainwashed and that as the son of a Sikh, I would remain Sikh and so the Bible went under the bed-settee and I thought that I would still be a Sikh.

That following week, lots of things went wrong in my life. I broke my window, the boiler stopped working, the kids fell ill and my wife and I started arguing. I got to the point of saying

aloud that I wished that the Christian minister who had taken me to the meeting would come and immediately, he knocked the door. This was the first time that he had visited my house rather than my Dad's house. My prayers were never answered so fast!

For a while, I thought that I could be a Christian and still be a Sikh as well and I was not interested in reading the Bible. However, I went to a Bible study with a friend one evening and at the end, someone said that he had a word from God for me but at first I would not listen. As we closed in prayer, I had a picture that I had thrown the Bible away and my friend said that he had the same picture. So I asked the other guy what God had told him for me and he said that it was that I was ignoring the Bible. Everyone then laid hands on me and prayed for me and I felt drunk again as I had on the night when I first committed my life to Christ.

Since then I have tried to follow Jesus and have been telling everyone that there is a God and that the only way to get to Him is through Jesus. It was a great joy when my wife also joined me in believing in Jesus Christ and we are seeking to bring up our children to know and follow Him also. God has given me a gift for composing and performing Christian songs which I want to use to worship Him and tell about the Good news that Jesus came to save us from our sins and give us a new life in him".

A long search

The Hindu lady was very moved that this young Sikh couple had found peace in Jesus, whereas she had been searching for that in Hinduism for many years, and she wanted to talk to someone. Here is her own account of how it happened;

"I was brought up in a Hindu family in Calcutta where my mother taught me to worship various statues, especially Durga,

and to pour water over the Shiva lingam stone. She told me that these statues were just symbols but I didn't understand what they meant or why we were worshipping them and so when I came to Britain, I stopped honouring the statues but still went along to a nearby Hindu temple without really knowing why.

In the temple, I found that there was competition over who would be chairman of the Vedic Society and that those who gave most money were the ones who were given the opportunity to offer the arti before the statues of Krishna and the other gods. This didn't seem right to me as it seemed to be like a business.

A Christian lady started to teach me about the Bible but I thought that I would go and find out about the origins of Hinduism in India. I travelled to the birth-place of Krishna and met with many sadhus or holy men but again I found that they all seemed to want money. One told me that if I gave 25,000 rupees, then my name would be engraved on the floor of the temple and all this again seemed like a business to me. For over a month, I went to many different religious places and everywhere I found the same money-grabbing attitude of the pundits and holy men.

All the time I was travelling, I carried a small Bible with me but when I returned to Britain, I was too afraid of what my family would say to go to church and find out more about Jesus. So I kept on visiting India every 6 months for the next 15 years, going to so many religious places searching for the way to find God and His peace. I didn't find anything really spiritual and gained no peace at all. My husband started to think that I was seeing someone else in India and this led to divorce and my children all left home because of my lack of peace.

In 1994, I had a big shock when my younger sister in Calcutta suddenly died. Something broke inside me and I thought that my sister who is younger than me has died, I could die and I still haven't found the real God. So in 1995, I decided to leave everything in Britain and went to Bangla Desh for a year where I met and married a Muslim man who wanted me to become a Muslim.

When I returned to Britain in 1996, my Christian friend invited me to a 25th wedding anniversary party. At that party, I saw so many happy Asian Christian people and I felt this happiness was something real and different. That night I could not forget the peace and happiness that I had found there and I regretted that I had not gone to church before. After that, every time I passed the local church, I felt something inside me calling me to go in and then one day, I started to attend the services and found a real peace there as well.

In 1998, I was invited to a baptism service at the local Asian Christian Fellowship and afterwards I really wanted to talk to someone about following Jesus. The pastor happened to come up and talk to me and I asked him if I could become a Christian. There and then I prayed for God's forgiveness through Jesus and gave my life to following Him. I then decided to take all my statues and Hindu photos and throw them into the river near my house.

At first, I was frightened to tell people about my new faith but after I got baptised 2 weeks later on 13th December 1998, I found a new strength to talk to my family about Jesus. My mother, auntie and other relatives and in-laws in Calcutta all accepted me as a Christian but my Muslim husband found it difficult.

My behaviour changed because God's Spirit in me stopped me doing the things that I did before and I have found peace.

My mother and auntie both became Christians as did my eldest sister and my neighbour in Calcutta. Also my 3 daughters in Britain all became Christians as well which has really helped their lives and produced much reconciliation in the family".

Starting the year with a week of prayer had been such a blessing and so much had happened in the year that we continued that practice each year, later adding two other weeks in May and September and occasional prayer days and all-night prayer meetings.

In the week of prayer in January 1999, God said in my mind, "The night is over, a new day is dawning". At the next day's prayer meeting, Kuldip asked if God had put anything on anyone's heart and I prayed that if that word was from Him then God should confirm it. Immediately, a lady said "God has given me a picture of standing on the deck of a ship and the sun is coming up" and so I also shared what God had told me. By March 1999, the experiments with the botox injections finally worked well enough to get rid of the pain that I had been suffering for about 2 and a half years!

Widening Horizons

Blank

Jesus taught in the parable of the sower that not all seed that is sown for the Kingdom of God goes on to bear fruit. He said that even the seed that takes root is often stunted by having shallow soil or by being starved of resources by competing weeds and that our Christian life and growth can be stunted by fear of persecution for our faith and by the distractions of chasing after wealth and the things of this world.

Although we had been seeing on average at least one Asian person per month professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ since January 1990, there is often much opposition, especially from the family, when someone from Muslim, Sikh or Hindu background wants to follow Jesus and about half of these dear folk who set out on the Way to follow Him never became strong enough in their faith to declare it openly in the community or to come to the Asian Christian Fellowship. There is a very real fear of them and their family losing honour and being ostracised in the community, of suffering verbal abuse and gossip and even occasionally of physical violence. Death threats are not entirely unknown and one Sikh family held a funeral for their son on the day that he got baptised.

Another 25% have ended up moving out of the city as have some of our longer standing members, a few of whom have

gone to their reward in Heaven (it was a sad loss when Vincent Nurmahi passed away in July 1999 and then Brenda Ashton in May 2000). As a result of all this, the growth in the Asian Christian Fellowship was very slow but nevertheless, the numbers doubled from an average attendance on a Sunday of about 40-50 around 1995 to about 90-100 by 2005.

Ripples across the sea

It was great that, from the early days, folk had seen their relatives also find faith in Jesus and this has also impacted beyond these shores, particularly back in the subcontinent and in the Indian diaspora in Fiji, Canada and other Commonwealth countries. One particular story stands out and it is told by an older lady from Sikh background who, despite being illiterate, grew in her Christian faith through tapes and cassettes and faithful attendance at church and Bible studies and really wanted to share the joy and salvation that she had found in Jesus with her relatives back home in Punjab, India;

“Our first visit to our village, Ganeshpur, in India, in the 80’s, after I had become a Christian was very difficult but proved key in what the Lord was going to do later.

The visit was also the first after our younger children were born. The Sikh custom requires that you celebrate the birth of boys by doing an Akhand Path (uninterrupted reading of the entire Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book) followed by a langar (food for everyone and anyone who comes). The family also wanted to invite “holy” men they believed in.

My husband’s older brother, who was the head of the whole family, was insistent that we had an Akhand Path but in my heart I was convinced it should not happen. Culturally, it would be a great dishonour to both my husband and his brother if I was to speak my mind and so my teenage daughter,

who had also become a Christian, and I prayed that it would not happen.

One evening when we were alone, my husband, who was not a believer and not very supportive of my faith, asked me what I wanted to do, knowing I wouldn’t be happy about the Sikh custom. I blurted out, “You know I’m a Christian and don’t believe in all these things”. I’m sure God gave me the strength and words as on the next day, my husband told his brother that he hadn’t come to India for religious reasons and didn’t want the ritual.

We still had the langar and to my great surprise, my brother-in-law quietly took my daughter and me to where they had stored the food and asked us to pray over it.

The next significant visit was in 1994, a few years after my husband had died. Sadly, he had a prolonged illness but through it, he had accepted the Lord Jesus only months before he died.

Again Sikh tradition is to have an Akhand Path after someone passes away. My daughters and I prayed that God would use us to share the gospel with our friends and relatives. As some groundwork had been done all those years ago, we could dictate what we wanted and we contacted the only Punjabi evangelist we knew at the time and asked him to preach at a langar-style gathering in honour of my husband’s memory. Over 400 people came and heard God’s word and took Bibles and other literature. For many this would have been the first time they heard the name of Jesus.

Although there was a lot of interest, there was also opposition and misunderstanding. Even my mother thought we were promoting the Muslim religion because she had heard that Muslims believe in Jesus. Later she secretly repented and

accepted Jesus and then gave witness to her new belief by being baptised in a tank of water in the village at the age of about 100!

Back in England, I worked part-time and saved money for my annual trips to India and the big evangelistic meetings in a tent in the village which became the format for all my visits for some years. In 1998, there was a small breakthrough and some of my other relatives found faith in Jesus. By 2000, I had stopped working and decided I would spend the winter in Punjab so that I could give more time to talking to those who were interested and had come to faith.

Early one day, after I had been there for some weeks, my sister-in-law, who was the first believer in Ganeshpur, came and challenged me saying, "You are always saying how powerful Jesus is. Can He heal a woman whose life has been ruined by an evil spirit that's taken her over for the past 6 months?" The village had tried all the usual channels to help her but with no joy.

In my heart, I thought "Who am I? What can I do?" But then I prayed, "Lord, it is You they are challenging and it's Your honour".

In uncertainty, I went to the woman's house where a crowd had already gathered because her husband had been shouting abuse at her and had called her brothers from another village to take her back home. As I entered her home, she ran towards me and hugged and held onto me tightly.

Holding her, I raised my hand and started to pray that Jesus would deliver her. As I prayed, I could hear voices around me saying, "Look, she is smiling" and "She has been healed". When I finished praying, she said, "I'm OK now, I saw Jesus and He made me better".

This was the real turning point in the lives of many living in and around Ganeshpur. On that day, the woman's immediate family, some relatives and many others who had come to see the commotion accepted the Lord Jesus.

Within days, my sister-in-law's husband, who previously had no time for Christianity, said to me that if we could remove the idols, which had been set up for generations, in his home, he too would turn to Jesus. These idols were a variety of stones to which they prayed and gave offerings. My daughter and I prayed and agreed to go and move them the next morning. As they bagged the stones, we stood in the back praying and it seemed as if the room had been electrified and our hair stood on end. They threw all the stones in a nearby lake and he and the rest of his family repented and turned to Jesus.

A little later, a woman and her daughter accepted the Lord and the woman was healed of depression. Shortly afterwards, her husband threatened to send her packing if she didn't give up Christianity. This would be a major stigma for a woman in an Indian village. She replied, "I can give you up, but not Jesus". Since she made this stand, both her mother and sister-in-law have come to faith in Jesus and her husband has mellowed enough to support their daughter marrying a Christian.

There were now about 20 Christian believers in the village and fortnightly meetings were held with the help of a relatively local pastor who did a round trip of about 100 miles to be there. People began to come to me and ask me to pray for them. As this respect grew, not everyone was pleased and I was no longer welcome to stay in another brother-in-law's home. I had been selling some of the land my husband had owned, but now I felt that we should have a neutral place both for worship and as a place for us to stay when we visited.

In June 2001, we started building and, despite my own poor health during that period, we had the opening celebrations for the church and our home on Friday 8th November 2002 when Kuldip came from England and shared a gospel message with a crowd of about 400 (only about 30 of whom were Christians). On the Sunday after, we had the first Sunday morning service in the church and on the Monday, two new believers from Hindu background became the first to be baptised in the building.

The trips to India increased from once a year to several times a year and the Lord provided various ones to pastor the little church. Through links with family and friends, we have held big evangelistic meetings in many other villages around Ganeshpur and thousands have heard God's word and many have taken Bibles and other Christian literature. Regular Bible studies have also been set up as well as short-term outreach clubs for kids. At one service in 2004, 17 people were baptised and 9 were baptised at another service in 2005. Not all who have become Christians worship at Ganeshpur but there are regularly 30-50 believers at the Sunday service.

All along, the work to which the Lord has called me has been a great struggle for me but the Lord's encouragement has always been to take just that first step of faith and see what He can do. I am now in my 70's and in poor health. I never had the opportunity to go to school and so I can't read or write (I even find it hard to dial phone numbers) and if the Lord can use me like this, think of what He can do with you".

We have often referred to this dear lady as our "international evangelist" and it delights God to use the unexpected and what others would consider weak. Through her years of faithful visiting and ministry, a small church has been planted in that village in Punjab for the first time in 2,000 years!

Ripples across time

October/November 1978, I travelled out to India by road through Europe to Istanbul, Turkey, then Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and finally India. That was the last year that it was possible to peacefully drive that route as the Shah's government collapsed on the day that we entered Iran and the Islamic revolution began followed by an awful war with Iraq and Christmas 1979 saw the Russians invade Afghanistan triggering fighting in that country that has lasted well into the 21st century.

As we drove down the main west-east road in Afghanistan, through cities like Herat in the west near to Iran, Kandahar in the south, the mountain-encircled capital Kabul and on to Jalalabad near the Pakistani border, I was praying for the Lord to raise up people for Himself in all these places as, at the time, there were hardly any known Afghan Christian believers.

In June 2002, I had been praying for more opportunities to meet up with open-minded Muslims and I received a phone call from someone who said that he knew a young Afghan man who was asking about Christianity and asked if I would be willing to meet up with him. I arranged to meet him and found a young Tajik guy from Herat (the first major city that I had travelled through in Afghanistan).

He was a refugee who had lost most of his family in the fighting and who had been interested in Christianity in Afghanistan but had waited until he had received permission to stay in Britain before asking about the Christian faith because he did not want people thinking that he was only interested in becoming a Christian to improve his chances of staying in the country.

Having spent a long time explaining the gospel, he was eager to pray for God's forgiveness through Jesus and to start a new life in the power of His Holy Spirit. I led him in a prayer

of repentance and faith in Jesus translated by a Muslim Tajik friend of his and gave him a New Testament in Farsi.

As we got to know each other in the following weeks, I asked him how old he was and he said 24. Then it struck me that he would have been a baby back in 1978 when I travelled through his home town of Herat, praying for God to raise up people to follow Jesus from that place. It was almost as if God had said, "OK, when this one grows up, I'll bring him over to you in England and you can bring him to Jesus".

He was the first of many Afghans that I came to know (most of them of similar age and therefore babies or children when I had passed through Afghanistan) and some of them started to find faith in Jesus, Pushtuns and Hazaras as well as Tajiks (including his younger cousin). 2003 became the first (and only so far) year in the work when the largest single group of new Christian believers were from Muslim background.

Most of them left Southampton for various reasons and the ripples of the Good News about Jesus spread. One of them shared his testimony with another young Afghan man in Leeds. This young man then phoned me and said that he was really interested to know more about Jesus and so I sent him a video of the life of Jesus and a New Testament in Farsi. Later, in September 2004, they both came for a visit to Southampton and we were having a Bible study about Jesus' two great commandments to love God and our neighbour when the young man from Leeds suddenly burst into tears. He said, "I've lived 21 years without knowing that God loved me" and he gave his life to Jesus.

No good tree bears bad fruit

God was widening the horizons of our work to include Afghans and it was a joy to get involved in serving Iranian

Christians also. Both Iran and Afghanistan had suffered under fundamentalist, strict Islamic governments who sought to restrict freedom of information and religion, enforce the strict corporal and capital punishments of Islamic shariat law and segregate men and women. Music and films were frowned upon and satellite dishes (and in Afghanistan, even televisions, radios and cassette players) were confiscated. All this has made many Muslims from these countries disillusioned with Islam and open to searching for another way of relating to God. This is the story of one of them;

"I was born in Ghazni province in Afghanistan. My family are Shia Muslims from Hazara background. I never went to school or had any education but learnt welding as a job.

My father, however, was interested to follow Christianity and had a Christian holy book. He used to go out from our house for 10-15 days each month and we did not dare to ask him where he went. He often asked me to sit with him and learn about Christianity, which he said was better than Islam because it did not promote fighting and there had been too much fighting in Afghanistan, but I was not interested.

All my friends were Islamic fighters or mujahadeen and after work, we would sit and talk and play around together. In 1996, I made a friend who liked to discuss other religions and I told him about my father's book. I brought it so that he could read it, as I couldn't read, but he didn't like the book and started shouting at me, "You are following Christianity and are not Muslims".

He called other people from the village and my boss asked what was happening. He told all the people that the book was proof that my whole family were following Christianity. I told them that I wasn't a Christian but they didn't believe me.

The head of the village came and they took me to prison and hit me. I was very scared. The police said to me, "We'll kill you and we'll hang you in the middle of the village so that other people will not go to other religions. You have committed a very big crime".

After this, people went to my house and found other books and the police told me, "Your house is burning and we'll hang you after Friday prayers".

On Thursday night, one policeman took me outside. I said "Where are you taking me?" but he said "Be quiet, don't talk, just come".

My uncle was outside the prison and he took me to his house which was 3 and a half hours walk away. I stayed there for 3 weeks and he confirmed that our house had been burnt. There was no news of my family and we presumed that they had died. My uncle said, "You cannot stay in this place because the imam has said that anyone who kills you will go to heaven" and he helped me to get out of Afghanistan to the UK.

When I went to the immigration court in the UK, I said that my father had followed Christianity but that I was not a Christian and they refused my case for asylum. I did not know what to do and just lived with Afghan and Pakistani people in London.

Every night, my mind was racing because I was so upset about my life and the loss of my family. I filled my mind with improving my English and trying to learn to read Urdu to take my mind off my sorrow and pain.

Eventually I came to Southampton and I told my story to another Hazara friend. He told me that he knew some good Christian people and that he sometimes went to their meetings

and he said that I could go with him the next time. I wanted to go to find out what it was that my father had wanted me to know about Jesus.

So on Good Friday 2007, I went with him to church for the first time. Everyone welcomed me which really impressed me. I listened to the talks about Jesus who had been very peaceful and loved everyone and wanted to save everyone and I decided that Jesus was the right way to God because He taught peace, love and forgiveness of sins.

I wanted to follow Him and prayed to make Him my Saviour and Lord. Jesus helped me to change and I left so many bad things such as gambling and smoking. I wanted to tell everyone that I had changed my religion by getting baptised".

Something like this story could be repeated many times throughout the Muslim world and there is a great need for the church to reach out to such folk with God's love and become a new family in Jesus for them to replace what they have lost.

Blank

Light out of darkness

Sometimes the light shines brightest in the darkest setting. In 2 Corinthians 12: 9, God says to His people “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” and 2 Corinthians 4: 6-9 tells us “God, who said “Let light shine out of darkness”, made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”.

The power of God’s love and life through faith in Jesus Christ to transform the human heart is seen best as He enables ordinary, weak folk to triumph over weaknesses, hardships, persecutions and difficulties in His peace and joy. He allows these things to come into our lives so that His light within us will shine brighter.

The above passage in 2 Corinthians 4 refers back to the time of Gideon in Israel’s history (Judges 7). Gideon faced an enemy alliance with an army of 135,000 with a force of about 32,000 men and although he was outnumbered more than 4:1, God said that he had too many men and asked him to announce

that any who were scared could go home. About 22,000 left but God said to Gideon that there were still too many and reduced the number further to just 300. Now Gideon was outnumbered by more than 400:1! With these odds, God was ready to rout the enemies of Israel and He sent them dreams of defeat whilst they slept.

That same night, Gideon encircled the enemy camp with 3 companies of 100 men with trumpets and empty jars with torches inside. At his signal, they all blew the trumpets, shouting "For the Lord and for Gideon" and smashed the jars holding up the torches that had been inside. The sudden sound and light panicked their enemies who even turned on each other in the confusion and the whole enemy army fled.

The lesson was that God would defeat Israel's enemies without them even having to really fight in their weakness. It was God's power, not theirs, which would prevail and in the story, the clay jars got smashed; "we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us".

God's strength in weakness

In the summer of 2001, one of the most devoted Christian ladies in the Fellowship, who had been with us since the beginning, fell over at our annual barbecue. We did not think too much of it at the time but there followed a steadily growing weakness developing in her legs. Early in 2002, she was diagnosed with motor neuron disease which is an illness that slowly paralyses leaving the sufferer at first unable to walk, then unable to lift things or use their hands and finally unable even to speak or move hardly at all.

She suffered this slow deterioration for 4 years becoming confined to a wheel-chair then losing the ability to feed herself and finally having to have everything done for her and being

unable to communicate. Despite all this, she radiated God's joy and peace and in all the times that I visited her, she never once complained. One day I arrived to see her at the hospice where she was staying and it was pouring with rain outside. I said, "What a horrible day!" and she immediately replied, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it".

Her simple and triumphant faith in her Lord and the peace that it gave her were a constant inspiration and encouragement to many and a challenge to the rest of us facing lesser difficulties. About a dozen nurses and care workers committed or recommitted their lives to trusting in Christ through her example during this time.

She passed into the presence of her Lord in July 2005 when she finally completed the difficult race laid out for her. If there was no God and death was just the end, all such suffering would be ultimately meaningless and human life would be, as Shakespeare said, "a tale told by an idiot; full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". But the Good News of the Christian faith is that Christ has died for our sins to gain our forgiveness and risen from the dead to lead the Way into a new life. Death is not the end but just a doorway into God's presence and eternal life for those who entrust themselves to Jesus.

Lighting the way to the future

Ever since the start of the Asian Christian Fellowship in 1983, we had always rented the use of churches near to the main Asian area of Southampton on a Sunday afternoon. As we grew in number, there was really only one church building that could hold all our services and activities (we would regularly get about 150 to our Christmas parties and sometimes to a baptism and we had had over 300 at a wedding or a funeral). It was therefore a profound shock when we received

a letter on Christmas Eve 2003 giving us a couple of months' notice that we would no longer be able to use that church for our meetings.

The other church near to the Asian area had a maximum capacity of 110-120 people and so, with a regular congregation of 90-100, we really packed it out and on special occasions, it was standing room only. As we expected to continue to grow in the Lord's time, we started to save up a building fund and to look for a church building of our own. The sales in the shop had been increasingly declining for many years and we felt that its time was over and that we would sell it in order to buy a building.

Over the previous 30 years, every church in the Asian area had closed down. 3 had become Sikh temples, 2 had been demolished and one had become an Afro-Caribbean social centre. Things did not look very promising and we even started to investigate nearby warehouses and large empty shop premises. A year went by and I thought that it would take another 3 or 4 years of saving up before we would have enough to afford a suitable venue.

At the end of 2004, God laid it on my heart that 2005 would be a watershed or turning point year for the work and I wrote that in my diary on 1st January 2005. At the same time, a lady in the Fellowship had a clear picture from the Lord of a stile between two fields. She felt so strongly about it that she had someone paint a picture of it and presented it to the Fellowship in January with the prophecy that we would be moving from one field of ministry to another that year (and it is currently sitting in my study).

On 23rd February, I was praying my normal morning devotions and God placed praying for the building so forcibly on my heart that I could not pray for anything else. I repeatedly

tried to pray for other things but my mind kept coming back to praying for the building. In the end, I gave up and just prayed for God to provide us with the right building to worship Him in the Asian area. This had never happened to me before like this.

After about an hour of such prayers, the intercom buzzed from the shop below (I was still living over the shop after 18 years) to say that a local vicar had come to see me. When I went down, he informed me that the local Parish Hall in the Asian area would be becoming available for purchase later in the year and that he thought that it would be a good idea for us to bid for it. As I knew the building, my first reaction was to ask if it would be big enough at which he was really shocked as that is not often the question about church buildings in Britain these days. When he said that, if the stage were to be taken out, it could probably hold 160-170, I had the conviction that this was the reason that God had got me praying for a building that morning and that this place must be from the Lord.

I started preparations to move out into my own flat and sell the shop. We had to do this in faith before we knew that we would get the hall (which was going to be put up for the highest secret sealed bid) as we needed the money from the sale of the shop to buy the hall but if we sold the shop and did not get the hall, then we would not have any base from which to work at all. It was a tense time of much prayer as we prayed about the sum to offer and put in our bid.

On 23rd August, the estate agent phoned me to say that we had made the successful bid! There was then a delay whilst the Church of England removed a covenant on the building and we got the keys on 24th January 2006. The money from the sale of the shop plus our building fund was enough to buy

the hall outright without having to borrow anything and we had some left over to start the necessary repairs and renovations. It had only been just two years since we lost the use of the other church building.

The major building work that was needed included a new flat roof, electrical rewiring, new heating system, internalising the stairs to the first floor rooms, a new kitchen and sound room as well as removing the stage and adjacent rooms to expand the main hall and install a baptistery. During all this, God again provided interest-free funds to tide us over and we did not need to borrow anything from the bank.

As we would be the only church meeting in that particular area, we wanted to be welcoming to the whole community and so decided to drop the word Asian (although we of course remained predominantly an Asian Christian Fellowship) and call ourselves the International Christian Church. It marked a huge change for a growing church to open in an area where over decades all the other churches had slowly closed down. In the prayer meetings for the new building, many people prayed that God would make it a lighthouse in the area and so we came to feel that God had given us the name Lighthouse for the church.

Lighthouses are built to warn sailors to avoid shipwreck on dangerous rocks or sand-banks and we saw the new church as seeking to shine God's light to prevent shipwrecking lives on the obvious rocks of gambling, drugs or alcohol abuse or on the more hidden sand-banks of greed, selfishness, lust or pride. A light guiding to a safe path.

The first time that I got to preach in the newly renovated building was the 23rd July 2006, which completed, for me personally, a series of major events to do with the building all happening on the 23rd; the initial news that the building was

becoming available, the phone call to say that our bid was successful and my first sermon there!

It was also the 23rd year since the work began in 1983! Looking back now over almost 25 years of God's faithfulness in miraculously providing everything we ever needed for His work in SACO and His grace at work in the Good News of forgiveness of sins and a changed life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf, we can see that this God never changes or lets us down.

He can wipe the slate clean of our past because Jesus died to pay the price for all we have done wrong and lift us up into a new living relationship with Himself through receiving the Holy Spirit as we make Christ the Lord and Master of our lives. Although we go up and down and pass through various trials and difficulties, His loving kindness and grace remain the same for all who will trust in Him. He delights to help and use us in our weakness and to shine His light to guide us in our darkest times and to brighten our hearts with His love. Even the shadow of death is not dark to Him and He can take us safely through to the other side.

If as you read this, God is still unreal to you, the Bible tells us that this is because we have lived our lives independently without submitting to His love. You have the opportunity to meet with this same God who answers prayer and is as real as the chair that you are sitting on and the bricks and mortar of the building around you (or of the shops or Lighthouse church). The Good News is that He loves you and came in Jesus Christ to seek you out and die on the cross to pay the price for your wrongdoing so that you would not have to remain cut off from His love forever. He longs to forgive you and take control of your life by the power of His Spirit so that it is changed and renewed in His image but only if you will trust and let Him.

You have read about many answers to prayer and a simple prayer entrusting yourself to Him is enough to come to God and have the gift of His eternal life. He hears and will answer you. You might like to pray something like this;

“Dear Lord God, I turn away from living life my own way and all the wrong things that I have done. Forgive me through Jesus’ death on the cross on my behalf and I trust in Him to be my Saviour and Lord. Jesus, I give you all that I am and have to be the Lord and Master of my life by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen”.

If you have prayed this prayer or one like it, then you can be sure that God has forgiven you and has already entered your life by His Holy Spirit. You have started a whole new life and have a destiny beyond the grave in Heaven. You will find encouragement by meeting with others who have the same power at work within them.