

BILL SUBRITZKY

**ESCAPE FROM
HELL**

as told to Vic Francis

Out of the Darkness
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PREFACE

Out of the darkness, into the light are the words from a famous old hymn. How true these words are for the young people who share their testimony of the saving power of Jesus Christ. To God be the glory.

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FOREWORD

We all need encouragement in our walk with God. As I have conducted evangelistic crusades in New Zealand and many other countries, I have been privileged to see the work of God in the hearts of men and women. In many cases, there have been dramatic changes.

In this book you will read of four people who had incredible encounters with the Risen Jesus Christ.

I do trust it will bless you.

Bill Subritzky

ONE

Suicide to Salvation

Michelle McGowan

When Michelle McGowan decided to commit suicide in August 1988, the ramifications were far greater than the loss of just one life.

Because not only had Michelle decided to kill herself, she had also resolved to kill her 11-year-old daughter, Jolene.

After a life of rejection, despondency and drug and alcohol addiction, suicide seemed the only way out to Michelle. And so came the decision - quiet, cold and definite - that she would kill herself, and her daughter.

It wasn't that Michelle wanted to murder her daughter - in fact Jolene was the only thing of worth in her life.

But Michelle felt she had to spare Jolene the ridicule and suffering inevitable when your mother commits suicide - and taking her life as well seemed the only way to do so.

Brought up on the West Coast of New Zealand, Michelle's mother died when she was 9, meaning she had to live with her sister. Although she now recognises that her rebelliousness had already begun at that point, it took a heated argument with her sister when she was 11 to really ignite it.

During the argument Michelle made what she thought was a cutting point: "You can't tell me what to do! You're only my sister, not my mother!"

But her sister's retort was devastating: "Well I've got news for you, I am your mother!"

And so the long-held and well-kept secret was out. Her "sister" had conceived Michelle when she was young and Michelle had been reared by her grandmother, who assumed the role of her mother.

"It destroyed me," Michelle remembers. "It was as if my life had been a total lie. Everyone I knew and trusted had lied to me.

"As a result I built walls around myself and nobody was coming in, nobody. As time went on those walls became reinforced, almost like concrete."

The resulting rebellion was to last nearly 20 years and bring Michelle within an ace of death.

Before long, a 12-year-old Michelle had begun drinking and then taking drugs. She adapted quickly, learning which pubs would sell her alcohol and where to get drugs whenever she wanted them. She became labelled as a troublemaker, getting in trouble with the police, teachers and her family. Each brush with authority only made her rebel more.

"I started using alcohol and drugs as an escape from facing what was really happening," she explains. "By using them I didn't have to feel or have emotions."

As the hopelessness increased, Michelle drank more and took more potent drugs.

"I was constantly hungry for more. You can never get the same effect as that first stone."

She was also dogged by a recurring nightmare - of discovering her grandmother's worm and maggot-infested body in a cemetery at night - and found the only way to escape it was to drink herself to sleep.

Michelle's drink and drug habits and growing hatred for her family caused a complete alienation between her birth mother and herself.

It got to the stage where Michelle wasn't invited to family gatherings because she would disrupt them by getting drunk, picking an argument or getting into a fight.

The final straw came when Michelle's mother's house was burgled and the police arrived at her door looking for the stolen property.

"I had 150 marijuana plants in the sunroom, just about ready for outside planting, when a policeman came to the door. I was well known to the police by then, and I had had run-ins with this particular cop before.

"He asked me if he could come in and have a look around but I told him there was no way he could without a search warrant. Eventually he left and, after a threat of returning with a warrant, never came back."

But Michelle was so frightened by her close escape that she promptly destroyed the marijuana crop - and vented her fury by blaming her mother.

She told her mother to "die and go to hell" and warned her that if she ever came on to her property again she would shoot her. "I would have done it, too. I had that much hatred."

From there things went from bad to worse.

Although Michelle kicked her alcohol habit after a spell in hospital, she continued taking a variety of drugs on a daily basis.

"I went from just smoking marijuana right through to using a needle."

Her life descended into a meaningless void, leading eventually to her decision to kill herself and Jolene by way of drug overdose.

"I hadn't set dates, but I wasn't going to back out. I was too pig-headed, too stubborn for that.

"I decided to kill Jolene because I couldn't leave her behind to suffer the torment and taunts of kids her age because her mother had committed suicide. I used to have a lot of dreams about things like that."

In an effort to give Jolene some final enjoyment in life, Michelle decided to go to Christchurch for a two-week holiday, after which they would return to the West Coast to die.

But things didn't turn out the way Michelle expected.

"I wasn't having a good time, despite the fact that all the drugs I wanted were available," she remembers. "I didn't even have a comfortable bed! And yet five weeks later I was still there!

"People were constantly ringing me from home wanting to know when I was coming back. That made it even more puzzling to me because I just couldn't make the move to pack up and go home."

But the delay kept Michelle in Christchurch long enough for God to revolutionise her life.

"I realise now that it was God's hand on me, because if I had gone home Jolene and I would be dead now."

During those extra three weeks in Christchurch, some other friends of Michelle's, Fiona Wedlake and Geoff and Christine Adams, turned up.

Michelle was delighted to catch up with Fiona, because they hadn't seen each other for some time, but she wasn't so excited to see Geoff and Christine.

"I was doubting a lot of friendships at that time," she explains.

The four of them got together a number of times, and on one of those occasions, after "rather a large session on drugs and alcohol," they began to discuss spiritual matters.

However, their drugged state and lack of knowledge meant they could find few answers. So Geoff, who had come from a Christian background, ended up by suggesting they take their questions to his mother. She, in turn, took them to a Christchurch minister, Ralph Bathurst.

"He told us about Christianity and I just sat there and scoffed," remembers Michelle, who had been brought up a Catholic but had no idea of a personal God.

The others were pretty sceptical, too, but they agreed to attend a meeting held by evangelist Bill Subritzky the following week.

"I made sure I was well and truly stoned before I went, and on the way to the meeting we joked and carried on," says Michelle. "Actually, though, we were quite nervous."

But as they approached the auditorium, Michelle realised to her horror that something was wrong.

"I thought I was going really nutty, because as soon as I walked through the doors my body felt stoned but my head wasn't. It was quite clear and it didn't have the normal fuzzy cloud around it. It worried me, freaked me out."

What it did do, though, was give Michelle the clarity she needed to hear and understand the message being preached.

Her memories of that first meeting are vague - singing and clapping, a smiling audience and healings which made her wonder how much people were being paid to fake a recovery.

But during the meeting she progressively withdrew, particularly after the audience was asked from the front to greet the people sitting near them.

"I thought, 'This is entirely ridiculous. I'm not into this.' I wanted to run, but something inside me wanted to stay at the same time. I didn't want to look chicken."

At the end of the meeting, Bill Subritzky called forward all those who wanted to get their lives right with God and make a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Christine, Geoff and Fiona, and Geoff's sister Deanne, responded immediately, but Michelle wasn't willing to make such a commitment.

"I sat there and said, 'No way.' They disappeared up the front but I was quite happy to sit where I was."

But while she was waiting for them, Michelle noticed a young man being prayed for by Bill Subritzky.

"All these weird noises started coming from him. I didn't know it at the time, but he was receiving deliverance ministry in which evil spirits were being cast out of him.

"At the same time I felt a hand on my back giving me a gentle push to go forward. I turned around to see who was pushing me, but there was no one close enough to have done it.

"At that time I wanted to move closer, but I couldn't bring myself to do so. And yet I knew that what I was seeing up the front was real, that no human could make those sounds or contort their face to look like that.

"So I challenged God right there in my seat by saying, 'Okay, if You are real, You will have to prove Yourself to me'."

God wasn't slow to take up the challenge.

That night Michelle returned to where she had been staying and, despite her best efforts, couldn't get stoned.

The next morning when Michelle woke up, she automatically reached for her tin of dope, rolled a cigarette and was just about to light up when she remembered that Fiona was going back to New Plymouth that day.

"No, I'll wait till later," Michelle thought, putting the dope back in her tin. "I'll wait till we pick up Fiona, and I'll get her stoned before putting her on the plane."

But the opportunity didn't arise. After seeing the plane off, Michelle, still not having had any drugs that day, began talking to Geoff and Christine about the Subritzky meeting. The result was that they all decided to go again that night.

This time Michelle wasn't stoned when she went, and although she felt "terrified" she desperately wanted to be there.

"Walking through the doors this time it was almost like going home. I felt natural there. I couldn't wait for the call to come forward and give your life to Jesus."

Eventually the call did come, and Michelle had no hesitation.

"That night I committed my life to Jesus Christ and accepted Him as my Lord and Saviour," she says simply.

The next day she realised that God had dealt with her drug addiction. She had gone two days without drugs and the temptation and desire to get stoned had passed.

"God had delivered me from the drug habit I had had for years and years. It had got to the stage where I couldn't get out of bed in the morning without drugs. If I didn't get drugs I would be a mess within half an hour. Yet despite that, I had no withdrawals, no cravings, nothing."

When she returned to her Greymouth home with Geoff and Christine, she found all her friends waiting for her so that they could get stoned together. They were incredulous when Michelle ordered them to take their drugs out of her house.

"It didn't interest me, I had lost the desire totally. It was like God put a glass shield around me. My friends would be sitting around the table with a drug session going on and I wouldn't even be able to smell it."

There have been times since when it would have been easier for Michelle to return to her old lifestyle than maintain her new-found Christian standards.

"I would dream about dope, I could smell it and almost taste it. At one time, I got out of bed and walked around the corner to see someone who could give me some dope, but then I decided that I wouldn't. When it has come to the crunch, when I have been tempted to go back, I have realised that it would be like picking up a tonne weight again. It's just not worth it."

"I still see people who are into drugs whom I have known for years, and it's like a dream that I was ever like them. It's like it was in another life."

Freed from the scourge of drug dependence, Michelle has spent the past years reshaping her life.

The planned suicide and murder became unnecessary because God had shown her the reason for living.

She has over that period set about repairing the damage in her own life and relationships caused by years of rejection and drug abuse.

She has started to set a good example for Jolene, whose life was also turned upside down by Michelle's conversion. Jolene didn't find the change easy - one minute she was in a drug environment, and overnight that changed, meaning she has had to deal with a new set of values.

Michelle has also, gradually, rebuilt her relationship with her natural mother: "For the first 18 months she was very reserved because I had been through the hospital to dry out and that hadn't worked. Why should this work? It hasn't been easy. There is a lot of hurt there that I have caused and there is healing to take place yet. But slowly I have seen the change and my family has been restored."

Michelle has changed personally, too: "Life is worth living, there is so much to do. It's like the song that says, 'All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife, but He made something beautiful out of my life.' I have trouble seeing the changes sometimes, but I know God is in charge and the changes are coming. I just put my trust in Him. I've had a life that has caused much pain and destruction to others, and I know Jesus has done miracles in my life."

When she committed her life to Christ, Michelle felt God gave her three promises.

The first was that He had known her from her mother's womb (Psalm 139).

The second was that the Lord was her Shepherd (Psalm 23) and that she would not want.

The third was that He would never leave nor forsake her (Joshua 1:5).

"God has always been there and He has always been faithful to those promises. The relationship I'm building with Jesus is the neatest thing that's ever happened. It blows me away that no matter where I am or at what level, Jesus accepts me as I am right there and then. I don't have to do anything spectacular, He just accepts me. He is slowly changing me, slowly turning me into what He wants me to be. He is leading me on."

Five years ago Michelle's future seemed so bleak that she wanted to end her life to avoid facing it. Today she is positive as she looks forward.

"I see the future as brilliant. I don't know what God has in store, but I know it will be right and that He will be right there with me in it."

TWO

The Ultimate High *Geoff and Christine Adams*

Death is a constant companion for punk rockers. Their music has a heavy emphasis on death, and their lifestyles are such that death within their own numbers is an all-too-frequent occurrence.

For Geoff and Christine Adams, death was never far away during their years at the centre of the punk rock scene in both Christchurch and Greymouth.

While they were fortunate to escape death themselves a number of times, they lost many of their friends through drug overdoses, suicides and accidents, and participated fully in a culture which lives close to the edge of life itself.

Geoff, who nearly died from drug overdoses a number of times, remembers a 15-year-old and a 16-year-old who were killed when their car crashed as they were being chased by police after stealing opium poppies. Another friend committed suicide by enacting the words of his favourite song.

"Over a five-year period I would say about 25 to 30 of my friends died," says Geoff. "They were good friends of mine, very good calibre people - but hopelessly lost."

As a child, Geoff seemed one of the least likely people to take up such a hopeless lifestyle. He was brought up in Christchurch by loving, Christian parents and made an early commitment to Christ.

But something went seriously wrong when he was a young teenager - he traces this back to when he was 14 and began listening to "subversive" music on student radio.

"It was quite a shocking sort of music - full of swearing, chaos and violence," he remembers. "It attracted me, and as a result I began dressing the same way as a lot of boot boys and skinheads around town had been doing for a couple of years."

Geoff also turned to alcohol and drugs, began running away from home, shaved his head, wore filthy clothes and dropped out of school.

About the same time his older sister, Deanne, and his older brother, Brent, also rejected Christianity, and Deanne was already involved in the punk scene when Geoff joined.

This put incredible pressure on their mother and father, who felt they had somehow failed - though Geoff puts the childrens' rebellion down to "the forces out there" rather than any fault on his parents' part. When their father died not long after - his children's rebellion may not have caused his condition but it certainly didn't help him get over it - it was left to their mother to carry the load and pray. Geoff certainly wasn't any help to his family at that time, preferring to stay with his punk friends rather than console his grieving mother. "Not being there when I was needed most is a decision I still regret today."

Looking back, Geoff points to the evil influence of punk and skinhead music as one of the main things that lured him away from Christian things.

"Punk music is very destructive, very negative and it's been used to enslave people and to drag their souls into hell. There is definitely Satanism behind it. It has a very powerful strong man of suicide, harvesting souls for the Devil."

One band, The 4 Skins, sang a song called "Evil, Evil, Evil". The lyrics ran:

I like breaking arms and legs - slapping faces, wringing necks.
Tear apart your vertebrae - kick your bones until they break. I'm evil, evil, evil.

"The overall message that is embedded into your heart from that music is, 'Act how you want to act, shock people, be violent and anti-society, live fast, die young, get wasted on drugs and kill yourself'."

Carried along by such music, Geoff's lifestyle became depraved.

"I went on into the punk scene headlong, with wild parties, riots against police, concerts that became rampages, drugs of all descriptions, sleeping around, burglary and thieving.

"I began playing guitar and singing in punk bands, growling obscenities and destructive lyrics to fast, abrasive music. The bands became reasonably popular and we formed part of the nucleus of the whole culture."

Geoff was only 17 when he met Christine, who is six years older, and not long afterwards he moved to Greymouth to live with her.

Christine's background was also one of rebellion and drugs.

She had been brought up by stable and loving parents in a Catholic home, but thought God and Jesus were a myth.

"I had such a normal upbringing, but when I was 13 I just took off on this really rebellious spree that didn't stop until I was 26. I don't know what got hold of me. I was ruled by a spirit of rebellion. I must have opened the door one day and it entered."

Christine had a baby daughter (who was adopted out) when she was just 15 and generally lived a decadent life of drugs, promiscuity, punk music, anti-social behaviour and even experimentation with satanic activities.

Christine describes her relationship with Geoff as "love at first sight," though she admits that they fought violently much of the time. They quickly decided to live together and before long had their own child, Lytoyah.

The first real indication that their lifestyle was so awfully wrong came, ironically, from little Lytoyah.

The walls in their house were lined with demonic posters complete with skeletons and fangs - and Lytoyah, in her innocence, knew they were wrong.

"At age two years she asked us to take the posters down," says Christine. "She could never sleep at night in her room because she could see a demonic presence that Geoff and I couldn't see. She could feel it in her room; her room was icy cold." They didn't find out until later, that a sacrifice to Satan had been made in their backyard years earlier.

But despite Lytoyah's warnings, Geoff and Christine weren't prepared to change.

Geoff became "bent on burglaries" to supply him with alcohol and eventually he was caught and imprisoned for three months.

"Jail stopped me doing burglaries, but didn't stop me following Satan's plan. I continued to take and sell all manner of drugs and I put Christine and Lytoyah second.

"I nearly died at least twice from chronic overdoses of intravenous drugs, but I believe that Jesus was stopping Satan from taking my soul.

"Most of my friends were dying. Many overdosed on drugs. Some hanged themselves, one slit his own throat, some slashed their wrists. My best friend soaked himself in petrol and set himself ablaze - I found out later that he had carried out the words of our favourite song to the letter. All around us things were crashing down, and we followed on like lambs to the slaughter."

Lytoyah's warnings may have gone unheeded, but the next warning was enough to send Geoff to his knees - at least temporarily.

Christine suddenly began having pains in her stomach, which turned out to be caused by an ectopic pregnancy. One night her tubes burst and they ended up in hospital at 3am.

Says Geoff: "It was touch and go. Sitting there in the waiting room I realised how short life was and that Christine could well die. I went into the toilet of the hospital and pleaded with God, 'Save Christine's life and I will give you my life as an exchange'."

Christine duly recovered, and Geoff promptly forgot his part of the bargain.

But God didn't.

Over the next few months Geoff increasingly began to dwell on the meaning of life - wondering why it wasn't adding up and realising that it was wrong that all his friends were dying.

With these thoughts "bugging" Geoff and Christine, they went to Christchurch with Fiona Wedlake, a friend from New Plymouth, for a few days in September 1988. There they met up with other friends, including Michelle McGowan from Greymouth and Geoff's sister, Deanne.

"We all ended up going to Deanne's house for a party on a Saturday night," Geoff remembers. "We were listening to the usual music, smoking dope and drinking excessively.

"About 11pm I believe the Spirit of God moved on me and I started to say to the others, 'Something's wrong with what we're doing with our lives.' I began to talk about our friends who had died. I said something like, 'It's like this scene we're in is cursed - I think we need to go to church to sort it all out!'

"And with that suddenly it seemed we were all quite sober. I believe the Holy Spirit descended upon us and we all simultaneously began getting tears in our eyes."

It was time for the prayers of Geoff's mother and Christine's parents to be answered.

Geoff and Christine went to see Christchurch minister Ralph Bathurst, and a few days later ended up at a meeting conducted by evangelist Bill Subritzky.

The meeting was a huge culture shock. Geoff was turned off by the singing, which seemed "all sappy and strange," but Christine loved it because it was "moving and healing."

"It was like walking out of one world into another world," says Christine. "I felt so very sick inside, very dirty, wondering what I was doing in this place where people were so happy and lovely and clean."

Geoff was less impressed, but he changed his attitude when Bill Subritzky began to pray for individuals from the crowd and people began to be healed and set free from demonic bondages.

"I had seen the Lord move before in meetings, but that was when I was younger. I had forgotten what it was like - when people started getting healed it really blew me away.

"It was the evidence of the power of God that got me. I also had the feeling that if I didn't move now I would never get another chance. It was as if time stood still while I made my decision."

Christine, too, was drawn to the reality of God in action - "I knew Jesus Christ was who they said He was. I felt Him in the building."

The message that night was about Jesus dying on the cross to pay the penalty for people's sins, and it spoke volumes to Christine, even though she had heard it many times before as a child in the Catholic church.

"This time it was like God opened my eyes and ears. He was starting to cleanse me."

When the appeal was given at the end, Geoff looked at Christine and they went forward. So did Fiona and Deanne. Only Michelle stayed back (though she did make the same commitment the following night).

Geoff says that night the Lord "totally revolutionised our lives."

"God instantaneously released us from swearing, parties, music, drugs and demonic holds. The next day we were clean living people. We still had a lot of growing to do, but we were changed instantly."

One immediate example of this change came the following day when Geoff and Christine went into the Square in central Christchurch.

"Some kids walked past us swearing and their language offended us like it had cut us," says Christine. "We couldn't get over how we had reacted to it. Normally it would have been us doing the swearing."

Geoff and Christine returned to Greymouth fired up by the changes in their lives. They proceeded, sometimes without the necessary wisdom, to tell their punk friends about the incredible experience they had had in Christchurch. Some responded, but sadly some are in the punk scene to this day.

The change in their lives was total, with one significant exception.

Geoff had a prior commitment to play with his band, the Genocide Factory, in a concert at the Christchurch Town Hall and he felt he had to turn up, although Christine was "totally against him going." He did perform, and the pressure exerted on him made him briefly slip back into his old lifestyle.

"It was tragic, but it made me determined never to go back again," he says.

Those who meet Geoff and Christine today would hardly believe the bizarre and frightening lifestyle they had five years ago. Geoff now operates his own insurance consulting business, they have two

more children, Jordan and Tyson, and Christine's first daughter, Helen, now lives with them.

Says Geoff: "God has freed us from spiritual bondage and hell; and has given us a strong marriage with four children in its place. Also I have a reason for living life to its fullest until the Lord calls me home instead of a life that was little more than a death wish. As the Christian hymn says, 'All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife, but He made something beautiful out of my life.'"

Christine: "God has given me direction and shown me I am a worthwhile person with a purpose here on earth. There is true love in our marriage which is something rare in today's world."

THREE

Finding God by Accident *Tom and Cherie Wylie*

Cherie Thomson braced herself for the worst as she walked into Auckland Hospital's critical care unit.

She had just flown in from Wellington after hearing that her partner of four years, Tom Wylie, had been critically injured in a car crash. She had been told he would be brain damaged, and as she hurried down the hospital corridors she tried to steel herself to cope with whatever she would find.

But nothing could prepare her for the sight of Tom lying there, lifeless, as machines beeped regularly and tubes supplied him with vital fluids and drugs.

Over the next few days Cherie sat and watched Tom die. She held his hand, stroked his arm, and nearly burst at her inability to help him.

She thought back over their time together, which had recently ended in separation, and her returning to Wellington for a break, meaning she hadn't been around when the car accident occurred.

And all the time, Tom's life was ebbing away. At times his condition stabilised, but it was always only a temporary respite followed by a sudden worsening and edging ever closer to death.

It was during those long hours at Tom's bedside, that Cherie began to pray. She knew of God - both her mother and Tom's mother were Christians - but had decided she didn't want to know Him and had chosen a lifestyle to prove it.

However, faced with the life or death of her loved one, she was willing to try anything.

That first afternoon she went for a walk, found a church and prayed there with the minister. She also prayed with Tom's mother. Friends and family all over New Zealand joined in prayer with them.

But although this brought them relief and comfort, Tom's condition continued to deteriorate.

Says Cherie: "We would see a little bit of hope that he would come through and then it would be dashed as we were told that he was slipping away again."

Tom made it through the first week - a small miracle in itself, because he had been expected to die within three days. But his condition was worsening by the day as his brain continued to swell and malfunction and the doctors prepared to switch off the life-support system.

"All the parts of his brain that could keep him functioning were going," says Cherie. "He couldn't even sustain his breathing, and even if he did survive he would be severely brain damaged - a vegetable."

Everything pointed towards Tom dying within hours.

It was Cherie's mother who suggested that, as a last resort, they should ask evangelist Bill Subritzky to come and pray for Tom. She had attended one of his meetings in Wellington and seen miracles of healing.

"It was towards the end, when there was no hope left really," Cherie remembers. "So my mother rang Bill Subritzky in the morning and he came straight away.

"On the way to the hospital he had a blinding headache, so he knew it was going to be a battle, and when he came in to see Tom he felt the angel of death around him.

"The doctors told him it was nearly time to pull off the life-support system and that there wasn't much point him being there. But we pleaded with them to give us a few minutes."

Cherie, her mother, Tom's mother, Tom's sister and Bill held hands around Tom's bed and together they rebuked the angel of death and asked God to heal Tom. Then they went outside and prayed again before Bill left, advising them to keep praying.

There was no instant recovery, but within hours Tom began to show some signs of improvement.

"After Bill left, Tom was stable throughout the day," says Cherie. "Nothing had changed. We were all very, very desperate and very upset, but we still had real faith that God would heal Tom.

"The night before Bill came, Tom had been slipping away really badly. The last thing that happens before you are totally brain dead is your pupils stop reacting - they check it with a torch - and one of Tom's eyes had gone completely and the other was on the way out.

"But the night after we prayed, out of the blue, his eyes began to react again, which the doctors said was medically quite unusual.

"That was the first sign to me that he was coming back. I was ecstatic and filled with faith and sure he was going to be all right."

The hospital staff down-played that initial sign of recovery, but by now Cherie knew God was on the move. This was confirmed to Cherie's mother, who heard a voice as she flew back to Wellington that God would heal Tom at the 11th hour.

Once the healing process had begun, it proceeded at a remarkable rate.

The next morning, Tom was noticeably better and within days he was responding to outside stimuli.

The doctors still discouraged any hopes of miracle cures, because even if he didn't die it seemed inevitable that he would end up brain damaged.

But there was no limit to Cherie's faith - despite the fact that she, and Tom, weren't Christians.

"The minute we knew that Tom wasn't going to die, we had faith that God had healed him. We just knew He wouldn't let him come through this and not heal him, so right from the minute his eyes started reacting again I knew he would be fine.

"I had always known that God was real because my mother was a Christian. I also knew that He was a good God. I hadn't handed my life over to Him, but being in that hospital I really reached out to Him. I knew that God was there with the family and with all of us.

"People around me thought I had my head in the clouds, but they didn't see it the same as we did. They still thought Tom would be really quite badly damaged."

Before long Tom was out of critical care and making a remarkable recovery. He confounded doctors, who anticipated a two-year convalescence, by leaving hospital just over a month after he was admitted.

"He was still very dazed from everything and still got very tired, but he was recovering really fast," remembers Cherie. "To me it was an instant healing, because brain-damaged people take a long time to recover."

But the real miracle in Tom and Cherie's lives - coming to a saving faith in Jesus Christ - had yet to come.

To truly appreciate the magnitude of that miracle requires a look back into their past - before Tom's life-changing accident.

Tom remembers attending Sunday school as a child, but "rebellious" when he was about 12. He came from a close, loving family, but for reasons he is unable to explain chose to reject all that.

Cherie, too, had a stable and loving background, though she remembers childhood loneliness because she had no brothers or sisters. Her mother became a Christian when she was 13, but although Cherie was somewhat open to spiritual things she steered away from her mother's faith.

Tom, in Auckland, and Cherie, in Wellington, slowly became engrossed in worlds of alcohol and drugs as they made unsavoury friends and allowed their rebellion to take root.

They met in Wellington in 1987, when Tom was on the run from the police, and quickly teamed up.

Says Tom: "I saw her and there was an instant attraction. I had a funny feeling that she was going to be something in my life."

Later, they returned to Auckland and were both involved in burglaries and drug dealing and usage. The more involved they got, the more their values and reality became warped.

People heavily involved in drugs undergo an incredible switch in values and reality.

"I have had \$1,300 in my pocket and not had enough for a meat pie," Tom remembers. "The money you had was always related to how much drugs it was worth. You would judge a car by how much it was worth in drugs."

Tom became extremely untrustworthy: "People started looking for a new address if I turned up."

Such an unhealthy lifestyle caused the couple's relationship to deteriorate, and eventually Cherie returned to Wellington.

The accident occurred about three weeks later - it was actually the evening of the day that Tom's mother had asked God to do whatever He had to do to bring Tom back to Himself.

Tom can't recall the precise lead up to the accident - his memory is blanked out for several weeks beforehand - but he has managed to more or less piece together the sequence of events.

That morning, depressed because Cherie had left him, he had visited a friend and bought Valium. Then he went to another friend's house and bought homebake.

Used together, the two drugs are particularly potent, and Tom was drugged so badly that he crashed his car into a power pole on the way home.

His dog, Stash, jumped free and was later rounded up, unharmed, by a friend. But Tom himself was badly injured. Not wearing a seat belt, he was thrown out of the vehicle and knocked unconscious, suffering massive head injuries.

Thus followed the miraculous chain of events which saw Tom walk from the hospital completely recovered in a few short weeks.

"It was a miracle," says Tom. "The doctors kept up their tests, kept making me walk back and forth, testing my reactions and my speech.

"I had been totally brain damaged and the doctors couldn't believe it. It was medically impossible, and yet I discharged myself within a month and all those doctors were left scratching their heads."

For a while he had some difficulty with balance and his concentration and memory were somewhat impaired. But these, too, came right in the ensuing weeks and months.

However, despite God saving Tom's life, neither he nor Cherie were yet prepared to commit their lives to Him.

Cherie, who had seen the miracle occur literally before her eyes, "tried really hard" to convince Tom that they should use their experience to straighten out their lives.

But Tom, who, of course, hadn't been aware of the miracle as it happened, was inexorably drawn back into his old lifestyle.

"I couldn't understand what had happened," he remembers ruefully. "The only thing familiar to me was drugs. It was the easiest alternative, therefore it was the only alternative. I was physically and psychologically drawn to that kind of lifestyle. I didn't even want to think about God healing me."

It wasn't long before Tom's lifestyle drew Cherie back into drugs as well. But she was always afraid of the consequences.

"I could never imagine Tom becoming a Christian. I would pray to God, thank Him for the healing, read the Bible, and even go to church every now and then, but I still wouldn't make that commitment."

Although Tom did not want to think about God healing him, his family noticed that he had mellowed and was more approachable. Tom and Cherie also became engaged and planned to marry in the near future.

Tom and Cherie went on a methadone programme to wean them off their drug habits, and Cherie determined she would commit her life to God when she was drug-free.

And it was during this period that God, finally, touched Tom's life in a way that was to transform his very existence.

It began in October 1991 when he went to a seminar held by evangelist Barry Smith, during which he heard about end-time prophecy and how imperative it was to get your life right with God.

He actually went as a favour to his mother - a kind of trade-off whereby he would attend the meeting in return for her sewing a patch on his leather jacket.

"I walked out of there a changed man," he remembers. "I didn't actually become a Christian on the night but for the first time in my life I listened and took it in and understood."

"I went home for a few days and the seed that had been planted grew and grew. On the Tuesday night I went around to Mum's place and knelt in front of her and asked her to say the words because I didn't know how to become a Christian. I just repeated them after her."

"I knelt and said, 'Jesus Christ, I invite You into my soul. I know that You died on the cross for me. You love me. You have forgiven me for all the sins I have done during my life and You loved me every day. You are always watching over me and I invite You to take control of my life.'"

Cherie, watching on, was stunned - and somewhat dubious. But these doubts were overcome when they arrived home and Tom pulled out three carefully nurtured marijuana plants and threw them out the window. Then he systematically went through all the "memorabilia" of his drug and criminal past and got rid of them.

A few days later, at a church service, it was Cherie's turn. At the end of the service an appeal was given and Cherie was one of the nine to go forward to commit their lives to Christ.

Tom and Cherie continued their methadone course, and gave-up all drugs.

"I had been trying for years to give up drugs, and I had failed every time" says Tom. "This time, with the Lord Jesus on my side, it was a breeze."

Life became rather hectic for Tom and Cherie in the months following their decisions to follow Christ, including their marriage in January 1992, a special occasion surrounded by friends and family.

Tom: "There is so much more purpose in my life, I've discovered that there is good in me and I'm concentrating on letting the good shine and being a good testimony. I visited a house the other day where they were into the same lifestyle we used to be into. It made me realise again how dysfunctional our lives were. It makes me so grateful that we are out of that."

Cherie: "It makes you feel really special when you think about the wonderful things God has done in your life. It has been like finding something that has been missing all my life. God has really bonded our relationship and we have become a lot stronger together."

Tom and Cherie are grateful to their mothers for their years of prayer.

"Our story is one of the power of prayer and faith," says Tom. "Never give up on anybody. My mum must have prayed for 26 years, and although she has had a lot of hardships in her life it's like it has been pay-back time from God."

Soon after his conversion, Tom went to the critical care unit of Auckland Hospital to pray for a young man not dissimilar to him who was injured in a motorbike accident. His presence praying for someone else barely a year after he had lain nearly dead in the same hospital spoke volumes to all who saw it.

POSTSCRIPT

Almost two years after the car crash, and 12 months after becoming a Christian, Tom met some old friends and unfortunately shared some drugs with them. He overdosed and died. Cherie naturally experienced considerable grief at this sudden turn of events, especially after only six months of marriage.

However, there is one thing she is sure of, that Tom is in heaven and that she will meet him there one day because they both believed and put their faith in Jesus Christ.

FOUR

President Changes Policies

Douglas Sadlier

Roaming the streets at five, stealing at nine, experimenting with drugs at 12, chasing girls at 15 - Doug Sadlier's life was headed for disaster almost before it had begun.

Conceived out of wedlock in the small rural settlement of Tologa Bay on the East Coast of New Zealand, Doug was quickly whisked away to the big city of Auckland to be reared by his grandparents.

But while his grandparents provided Doug, his brother and his sister - as well as a large variety of other people who ended up living in their lower-class Te Atatu North home - with plenty of love, discipline was rather intermittent and young Doug ran wild.

"The most awesome thing for me was freedom," says Doug. "My grandparents had already raised a number of families and were tired and old. So I had the freedom from a young age - five, six, seven - to go into town by myself and do what I wanted."

As he grew a bit older, he quickly learned the arts of shoplifting and picking pockets, and became something of a leader of a group of mostly Maori children who lived life on the edge.

"Three or four of us would go into town with just enough money for our bus fare there. We watched what people were wearing, usually rich white kids, and picked their pockets for our space invader money and our return bus fares.

"We knew the fire exits for all the picture theatres, so we saw every movie for free. We also knew all the space invaders, and when we played people came to watch because we knew the new moves before everyone else."

Doug was the most daring of the group: "My friends would go into a shop and steal a pair of shorts; I would go in and steal 10 pairs. If it was something daring, the other guys would get me to do it."

Sometimes he got caught, and on the occasions he wasn't able to run away he tried to lie his way out of trouble. Once or twice he ended up at the police station and his grandfather was called.

"He would slap me around my ears in front of the police, and give me the rod or the belt when we got home. But that didn't deter me; I knew that until I was 16 or 18 nothing really would happen."

Despite such an unsavoury lifestyle, Doug was an adept scholar who never missed school. Sometimes he would be out all night, perhaps sleeping in a park, but he still managed to make himself respectable and perform well at school the next day.

He was aware even then of people whose lives were worse than his - particularly those sleeping on the streets - and determined never to let his life deteriorate that far.

He also avoided some of the more violent pursuits of his peers, preferring to talk his way out of explosive situations - though he did at times have to relinquish his stolen goods to bigger and more aggressive children and young people.

Yet despite the freedom, money and notoriety gained by his lifestyle, young Doug couldn't escape two things - he was lonely, and he knew there was a God.

"From 9 to 13 I was getting into lots of trouble and felt pretty lonely. A lot of kids at school saw me as a cool dude and a bad guy, and they avoided me. Because I had that image I would go ahead and get into trouble even more.

"But I was really lonely in my heart. I used to read heaps of books - I read Tolkien at intermediate school and devoured Stephen Donaldson's science fiction - because I didn't have any real friends to play with. My only friends were the ones who would steal."

Throughout this emptiness he cried out to God to show him the meaning of life and sought a relationship with the Creator that he knew was available but didn't quite understand how to attain.

"My backyard was church for me," he remembers. "I knew there was a God - I think it may have had something to do with my Maori background - and I would get out there and talk to Him. I talked to Him about everything - He knew everything anyway, so I never held back."

One of Doug's prayers was for a friend, a true friend, and God answered his prayer within a fortnight when a new family, the Teteinas, moved into the area.

The parents, Katoa and Pauline, were pastors of the Henderson Christian Fellowship, and one of their sons, Steve, was Doug's age.

Doug and his friends began to congregate at the Teteinas' house - partly for the home baking, which was great, but also because there was a serenity and a peace there to which they were drawn.

For a while their presence had a negative effect on Steve Teteina, because Doug and his friends introduced him to stealing and

smoking - but after a while the previously untameable boys began to respond to the warmth of the Teteina family's Christian love.

"We didn't just hear the Gospel of Jesus as some people in the church preach it, but we saw it in these people's hearts. We could see goodness in their lives that we didn't see in other people's lives. We smoked, we got their son into trouble, but they still continued to love us and that's what really spoke to us."

Doug, aged 13 by now, was transformed. He stopped smoking, drinking and stealing and became immersed in the church scene as completely as he had been in the street scene.

"I went to youth meetings, had basic teaching on the Scriptures, went to Christian camps, sang songs and was baptised in the Spirit and spoke in tongues. It was really cool, we were really going for God."

But teenagers face a multiplicity of temptations, and after a couple of years as a full-on Christian, Doug began to be drawn away from Christianity, particularly by his growing awareness of the female sex, his involvement with rugby league and surfing, and the friends he made through these pursuits.

Doug had first been introduced to drugs as a 12-year-old when he and a friend went to the huge Sweetwaters rock festival south of Auckland.

He gave it up while he was a Christian, but as his faith receded he quickly picked it up again.

"With the surfing came a whole different lifestyle. We would go to the beach and have a joint and then go out and have a surf. We also drank heavily; in fact we couldn't go to the beach without a dozen beers. We'd smoke, have a few drinks, go have a surf and then party up afterwards.

"With rugby league, which is quite strong in Te Atatu, came dope and drinking and lots of parties.

"And then at that age all the girls were looking really, really pretty...."

Doug stopped stealing - he now earned his own money working at a fast-food restaurant - but his lifestyle deteriorated again.

School, however, continued to be a priority. Doug loved the sporting and social activities, though his academic progress became somewhat sporadic. He failed his sixth form examinations first up, but passed them the second time. Then, though his friends all left school, Doug decided to stay on for a final seventh-form year.

It was that year that he met Tracey Mailand, a quiet girl from a Christian home, and an unlikely relationship developed.

For years to follow Doug and Tracey were boyfriend and girlfriend - though Tracey remained a low priority in Doug's life. They went out together once a week or so, but mostly Doug

preferred to party with the boys. Occasionally he turned up to Tracey's house drunk or stoned, and she would have to turn him away to stop her parents seeing him in that state.

Doug openly told Tracey that her place in his life came somewhere after drugs, alcohol, surfing and partying.

Yet despite this, Tracey, who wasn't pursuing a Christian life herself, hung on to the relationship.

After leaving school, Doug headed for university and there discovered an even wider world of drugs and parties.

"At high school we smoked dope and drank beer and spirits, but from my first day at university I got introduced to bigger drugs such as mushrooms, speed and acid. I discovered people there who were like me, people who were totally wasted like I was. So now my whole life was party, party, party."

Doug quickly became a popular figure at parties. he was the fastest drinker around, had good contacts for supplying cannabis and was generally recognised and respected as the last man likely to be standing at the end of a party.

Against this background, Doug decided to run for President of the Auckland University Students' Association. He viewed the position as a potential source of income and also resented paying an annual fee of more than \$100 to the association but seeing no tangible return for his money.

His campaign was low budget - complete with photocopied posters of himself between two monsters with the caption "The choice is obvious" - and his main platform was "more drugs, more alcohol, more parties." His most radical idea was to fly a helicopter load of cannabis into the university quadrangle and let the students have a massive party.

He campaigned hard, and generated enormous support from similarly anti-social students, but didn't really expect to beat his well-funded opponent. However, when the votes were counted he was astonished to discover he had won by 200 votes.

True to his campaign theme, he promptly went to the bank, borrowed \$5000 on the basis that he was the incoming student President, and held an outrageous party - providing free tequila and cannabis to the many who came.

But while the party was an outstanding success in student terms, it left Doug facing huge bills before he had even taken office, while another party held to help pay for it was a flop and left him even further in debt.

This, coupled with an empty ache that had been with him since he abandoned Christianity years before, left Doug extremely depressed.

"I had just finished my planning degree, I had this really awesome girlfriend, a couple of cars, lots of cash and to everyone else I was just laughing. And yet, inside my heart I wasn't really happy at all. I would go out and party it up, but when I'd get home I'd spin out on my bed thinking, "Why am I doing this? I'm feeling really lonely."

For a while he successfully ignored these signs by partying harder, but for Doug Sadlier, the writing was on the wall. The drug-filled life was being exposed for the fraud it was.

The change began when Doug was part of a Maori ski team competing in a university competition, and discovered to his discomfort that he was staying on the same marae as an ardent Christian team-mate.

Doug tried to avoid the man, and to ignore the voice of God gnawing away at him, but to his consternation he ended up having to travel home with the same man and receiving the Gospel message for three hours solid.

By the end of the trip, Doug was convinced he needed to get his life right with God once more, and agreed to make another commitment to Christ.

"I had lost heaps of money, I was getting sick of drugs and alcohol and I knew God was real and that He could help me out. So I made a commitment there and then in the car, and then went down to see the Teteinas, who prayed for me."

However, escaping the spectre of his old lifestyle wasn't that easy.

When Doug told Tracey of his decision she "spun out" and their relationship broke up. The following week he was involved in a rugby league tournament in the Waikato, and though he announced to the team that he was now a Christian, he found the pressure to conform too much to bear.

"They were real drug heads and alcoholics, and to them it was a challenge to get me wasted. And sure enough, they needed someone for the drinking team. I joined in, and it became a week of total decadence."

Doug felt confused and terribly guilty at having blown his new-found faith so quickly. However, Tracey was delighted at the turnaround and the couple got back together again.

But a few weeks later, evangelist Bill Subritzky came to Te Atatu, and for reasons they still can't fully explain, Doug and Tracey decided to forego the movies and attend his meeting instead.

They knew many of the people present, both Christian and non-Christian, because they came from the close-knit Te Atatu community and in many cases had grown up together.

"An old lady I knew went up the front and said, 'I've got a back problem' and I knew this was right because I had seen her around and knew about her problems," says Doug.

"She hobbled up the steps, Bill Subritzky prayed for her and she was able to walk and jog back down the steps. And all the time I was freaking out going, 'Oh yeah, man, that's pretty awesome.'

"I had seen healing happen when I was a younger Christian, so I understood the principles. But to see a person from my community touched in that way, and then others as well throughout the night, made me realise it wasn't just a big have.

"I was seeing an affirmation of God's power, and at the same time the still voice of God was speaking to me, 'Doug, what are you doing with your life? Yeah, you're the President, you've got cash, you've got cars, you've got a good girlfriend, you've got your degree. But where are you going, what good are you doing?'

"God was presenting me with a challenge. He was saying there were two roads - a narrow road which I knew about, and a broad road that would lead to hell. And He was saying pick it now. If I took the wrong road I would reap the consequences, maybe even death. It was like my last chance."

Doug knew God had been looking after him despite his rebellion. At times he had blacked out because of drugs, and he'd been involved in numerous car crashes through drugged and drunken driving, but he always seemed to have a hedge of protection around him. Now, he sensed, the hedge was about to come down.

Even as Doug was hearing God speak, Tracey, sitting next to him, was also in turmoil.

A few months earlier she had been at an occultic meeting involving a ouija board during which demonic forces told her she was going to die.

She was too drunk to worry about it at the time, but when she was nearly killed in a six-car pile-up on the motorway soon after, she began to fear for her life.

Sitting in the Bill Subritzky meeting, Tracey couldn't get those events out of her mind - "It freaked me out when I thought about it. The ouija board had told me I was going to die and I nearly did." She was also overwhelmed by emptiness and loneliness, her relationship with Doug over the years having ruined many of her Christian friendships.

"I hadn't heard the Christian message for a long time, and I found it was talking to me afresh," she remembers.

As God continued to speak to Doug and Tracey individually, Bill Subritzky gave an appeal for people to commit their lives to Jesus Christ.

"I felt I should put up my hand and go up for prayer," says Doug. "Tracey put up her hand as well. I just went, 'Far out,' and we went up together and asked Jesus to come into our lives."

Because they knew so much about Christianity already, Doug and Tracey quickly thrived in their new faith.

It was the university holidays - with Doug set to take up his presidency in the new year - and so they immersed themselves in church activities, prayer, reading and getting input from other Christians.

"A lot of Christian people came around us in support," says Doug. "They realised I was the President, and that I had got in on the basis of sex and drugs and rock and roll."

"They prayed for me and helped me get a good foundation in the Word of God. I also began visiting my mate's grandfather, Alan Thrift, who had been a Christian for 60 years, and he gave us tips on the way we should live our lives."

Returning to university to face people who had elected him on a more-drugs platform was always going to be tough, but Doug faced it head on.

"At my first speech on open day I spoke in Maori and then went into English. I told them my mountain was Calvary, my river was the blood of Jesus which cleansed me of my sin, and my captain was Jesus."

He received plenty of flak, and many people, as well as the student newspaper, called on him to resign. Members of the executive also tried to vote him out at times, and more than once he only retained his position by his own casting vote.

"I felt I was doing a good job, and that I should stay on," he says.

Doug believes God honoured his faithfulness to Him.

"The Students' Association had an orientation event which the year before had lost \$120,000, and the year before that \$60,000. That year it broke even. We had a graduation ball that usually loses heaps of money, but that year we actually made a profit of \$800. In my first year as President we had a surplus of \$250,000, which had never happened before."

"I believe I was God's representative and that God blessed me in that position, even if I was representing a heathen institution."

While Doug attracted plenty of opposition, he also had widespread support, as was shown the next year when he won the presidential elections by a landslide before losing narrowly when chasing a third term.

Life is now completely different for Doug and Tracey Sadlier, who got married on December 14, 1991.

Tracey is nursing and Doug is looking for full-time work while still studying part-time at university.

They are immersed in their church, Te Atatu Bible Chapel (Doug's a Sunday school teacher), while Doug still receives invitations to come and speak as the former university President.

This time, vows Doug, there will be no turning back.

"I have played league, surfed, smoked a lot of dope, drunk a lot of alcohol, sniffed glue and lived on the streets.

"But I have discovered in Jesus Christ a reality which I will never give up. There are still difficulties, but through the hard times I have a real peace and a sense of God's blessing and direction.

"I know beyond a doubt, because of the experiences I have had, that there is a God who wants to be part of my life. I welcome that."

FIVE

How to be Born Again

Bill Subritzky

1. WE MUST COUNT THE COST

There is a cost involved in being born again. The Bible tells us to count that cost before we decide to follow Jesus.

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it -

"lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,

"saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

"Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27-33)

Becoming a Christian is not simply joining a club. It is a decision to take up a new way of life and become like Jesus Christ Himself, a revolutionary. This does not mean that we set out to pull down fleshly governments, but that we decide to adopt a radically changed life-style in the sense that Jesus Christ is now going to become Lord of every part of our life. Hence we need to consider the cost that is involved and be sure that we are prepared to pay the price. Once we have made that decision and never turn back, then we will begin to understand the job of being a Christian.

There is no "cheap" or "easy" grace. That is, we cannot expect God's favour to be upon us if we do not actively turn from sin and obey the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. BECOME LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

Having considered the cost, we then need to become like a little child in our approach to God. We need to put aside all prejudice, arrogance and pride and humble ourselves before God.

"Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,

and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. (Matthew 18:2-5)

Our education will not get us into heaven, nor will our works of themselves. Jesus has pointed out that we need to humble ourselves like a little child if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ shocked His disciples by washing their feet before He went onto the cross. Peter objected to this but Jesus said that if He was not allowed to wash the feet of Peter, then Peter would have no part with Him. Peter quickly agreed to the washing, not only of his feet but also his hands and his head. Jesus then said:

"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:13-15)

Satan fell because of pride. Pride is the greatest enemy to our coming to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Jesus has given us the example of humility.

3. REPENTANCE

Repentance does not mean being sorry for our sins, but rather turning completely from them. It is a 180 degree turn. It is a **decision** to turn from sin, not a feeling. When Jesus met Paul on the Damascus Road he spoke words which very clearly described the meaning of repentance:

"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:18)

Repentance is therefore turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. When we turn from darkness to light it means we allow the light of God fully into our lives and we turn away from all the darkness of sin.

John the Baptist, who was six months older than Jesus Christ and came as the forerunner to proclaim the coming of the Lord, preached the message of repentance. Among the first messages that Jesus preached were the words, **"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)** Repentance involves a **complete change of heart, not just an emotion.**

In the story of the Prodigal Son, the young man left his father's home after receiving his inheritance. He went and squandered it. When the son came to himself as he lay among the swine and wanted to eat their food, he said:

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:18-19)

And the next words we read are:

**"And he arose and came to his father."
(Luke 15:20)**

He decided to repent and go back to his father. He in fact did something, namely he arose and went to his father. This shows the decision needed for repentance.

On the other hand, we are told that Judas, who betrayed Jesus Christ, was remorseful after he saw that Jesus Christ had been condemned. He brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. However, he was not repentant and therefore could not know God's forgiveness. In his remorse he went and hanged himself.

Remorse is a feeling, repentance is a decision. Repentance is where our will meets the will of God on the cross of Jesus Christ. We place our will under God's will and decide to follow Jesus. That is true repentance. No matter how we feel we make the decision and follow it.

We need to get on our knees and confess our sins to God. It is good to do this aloud and as we confess them the devil begins to flee from our life. We should do this from our heart. Tears of conviction may well flow. We need to forgive others, especially our

parents and those who are closest to us. Lack of forgiveness on our part is the greatest barrier to a true walk with God. He has forgiven us of all our sins and therefore we must forgive others. We must renounce all involvement in the occult, all wrong forms of sexual activity, all lying, cheating, immorality of all descriptions. The more repentant we are, the more we open ourselves to the Spirit of God. We can confess our sins directly to God through Jesus Christ because there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. On occasions it is good to confess our sins or trespasses to one another.

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16)

Whichever way we do it, it must be a heartfelt decision to turn from sin, to bring all the darkness out into the light so that the darkness flees. As we do so we will begin to know true deliverance from the power of sin.

4. RENOUNCE

Having confessed those sins, we then need to renounce them. That is, we need to turn absolutely from them and say that we do not want them in our lives and renounce them in the name of Jesus Christ.

5. GOD'S GRACE

In all of this we must remember the grace (favour) of God. It is through His favour that we have been saved through faith which God gives us. As we truly repent and turn from sin and turn to God, we find that the gift of God's faith and favour begins to operate in our lives.

If you have followed the above steps, then you are now ready to be born again. In following the above steps you may already know the infilling presence of God upon you, but in any case, we should remember the condition of entry into the kingdom of God set out in Romans 10:8-10:

"But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:8-10)

Thus, as we confess with our mouths the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.

6. ARE YOU READY?

If so, could I have the privilege of suggesting a simple prayer which you might like to follow as you go on your knees:

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to You in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. I come a sinner and I now renounce all of my sins. I confess the sins of (name those sins) and I utterly renounce those sins in the name of Jesus Christ. I absolutely turn from them. I especially renounce any involvement in the occult (if you or your parents or ancestors have been in Freemasonry or Druids Lodge you should especially renounce that involvement). I renounce all the works of the devil.

I believe Jesus Christ came into this world, born of the virgin, that He walked this earth, that He was crucified on a cross and that He died in order to cleanse me from all sin, to reconcile me to You, Heavenly Father, and that through His precious blood He bought me back from the hand of the devil. I believe He paid the total penalty for all of the sins I have ever committed and that through His blood I am cleansed, redeemed and sanctified, that is set apart to God, and justified, that is just as if I had never sinned.

I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day and is seated now at the right hand of God. I turn to You, Lord Jesus. I turn away from the power of darkness to the power of light, from the power of Satan to the power of God, and I ask You, Lord Jesus, to come into my life by Your Holy Spirit. I surrender absolutely to You and I confess You as my Lord and my Saviour.

As you complete this prayer, you may well feel the peace of God descending upon you. It is good to stand to your feet and begin to thank God and praise Him for His goodness. You will start to realise the certainty of salvation in your heart and the fact that God has forgiven you and reconciled you to Himself through Jesus Christ. The joy of God will begin to flood your heart.

7. WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

On the day of Pentecost when Peter was preaching to the Jews and they were convicted in their hearts of their sins, they asked Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

The response of Peter was:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

You have now repented and now you need to be baptised in water if this has not happened to you before.

(a) WATER BAPTISM

Jesus Christ gave us the example of the need for water baptism as He Himself went under the waters of baptism. Even though John the Baptist argued with Jesus when Jesus asked John to baptise Him and said:

"I have need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14)

The response of Jesus was:

**"Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."
(Matthew 3:15)**

Thus Jesus Christ gave us the example of the need for water baptism. When we undergo the waters of baptism, we fulfil what should have already been accomplished in our heart. Water baptism is the outward manifestation of the transaction which has taken place in our hearts as we have given our lives to Jesus Christ. In undergoing water baptism we identify with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. As we undergo the waters of baptism, we recognise that our old lives have died and we are rising to a new life in Jesus Christ and that we are no longer the slaves of sin.

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (Romans 6:3-6)

Most cultures recognise the power of water baptism in one form or another. They recognise that it is a cutting off from the old life. For example, in India where I have seen many come forward to make a decision for Jesus Christ, there is often no real difficulty in

their home life until they undergo the waters of baptism. It is then that the real cutting off point occurs because their Hindu brothers and sisters recognise that this is a complete cutting off from the old life. Many times they disown the relatives who undergo water baptism. They may even throw them out of their homes. Thus there is a real price to pay to be a Christian in that land.

Water baptism is an act of obedience towards God. It is good for it to be carried out publicly before other believers with the candidate testifying about God's life-changing power in his or her life.

Church Attendance

It is important that we belong to a church that worships Jesus Christ and believes in whole Bible. It is recommended that if you do not already belong to a Christian church, that you join a Bible-believing church so that you can grow as a member of the body of Christ.

(b) BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus Christ told His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. He had already breathed on them on the Sunday night of His resurrection when they received the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22) Now He was telling them to wait for the promise of the Father so that they could be endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:49) We see those same commands set out in Acts chapter 1:4-8 when He promised that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

(Acts 1:8)

They duly waited a further ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven and then on the day of Pentecost the power of the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they spoke in tongues. Peter explained that Jesus Christ, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, had poured out this which they now saw and heard. (Acts 2:33).

How to ask for the Baptism with the Holy Spirit

1. Go on your knees before the Lord and confess all your sins and receive God's forgiveness.
2. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.
3. Allow the Holy Spirit to remind you of any areas of occult involvement on your part or on the part of your parents or

ancestors. Renounce that involvement in the name of Jesus Christ.

4. Believe in your heart that the Word of God is absolutely true and that God, through Jesus Christ, will give this great blessing to you as you believe.
5. Say a simple prayer like this:

Dear Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, I renounce all my sins (name those sins) and I especially renounce all involvement in the occult or witchcraft on my own part or part of my parents or my ancestors. I renounce all fear and unbelief and any blockage of my mind. I ask You Lord Jesus to baptise me with the Holy Spirit.

How to Receive

You may be standing or kneeling. It is good to close our eyes and think of Jesus seated at the right hand of God, ready to pour out the promise of the Father upon us. As we quietly wait upon Him and allow Him to do this, we begin to sense the peace of God. We should not listen to what we are saying, but let God give us a new language. Then we will find that from our innermost being will flow a river of living water of worlds as the Holy Spirit helps us.

"but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

(John 4:14)

While we are kneeling and praying to God through Jesus Christ, we should realise that the Holy Spirit, deep within our heart, will rise up as we allow Him to do so. He will come like a river onto our tongue and help us to speak out in our new language.