

Christmas **THEN and NOW**



How Jesus changed Christmas for me forever

Gram Seed

Christmas Then

I would love to forget Christmas Day 1995 but I never will. In the freezing cold I crawled half a mile on my hands and knees from my bench to the off licence for a 3 litre bottle of White Lightning.

The bench had been home for me for more than three years, ever since my Mam finally gave up on me. I couldn't blame her; my drinking had made her life hell

for 10 years, as I continued to pester her for money. On one occasion I ransacked her cottage. I was a lowlife and I didn't care who I hurt. I named my price for agreeing to get out of her life – a couple of grand. She took out an injunction and disowned me.

That Christmas the bench was where I expected to die anytime soon.

The bench had been home for me for more than three years. It was where I expected to die anytime soon.


Christmas Now

Now, Christmas is one of the happiest times of the year for me, as it is for many families. Christmas with my family – Natasha and our sons, Caleb and Boaz – is all the more beautiful because I missed out on this sort of Christmas as a boy.

Christmas is also one of the highlights of the year for the charity which I founded in 2006, Sowing Seeds Ministries. We make it a special time for single parent families, especially the children. We put on a professionally produced pantomime for about 180 children; needless to say, they do not go home empty-handed.

But, most importantly, I now understand the real reason for Christmas – to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world. That is what I truly celebrate at Christmas.

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back to Christmas Then

But back to Christmas 1995. By the following spring I had really come to hate myself and I assumed that everyone else did too; they had every reason to. I had previously attempted suicide but I decided not to bother again. I thought I might as well die 'happy' by drinking myself to death. I knew that it wouldn't be long.

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by drinking myself to death.**

But one Friday night some lads came up to my bench and began a conversation, telling me that Jesus loves me. I swore at them and told them to get lost. But they didn't, at least not for good. Over the coming months they spent endless hours each week, just chatting to me and showing that they genuinely cared about me.

The day that I had been expecting – when I would die – seemed to have arrived when I was found unconscious. In intensive care I was diagnosed with hypothermia,

pneumonia, septicemia, severe malnutrition and dehydration. On top of that, my liver was starting to shut down. Five days later, now in a coma, my kidneys began to fail. But my Mam refused permission to turn off the life support.

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And then the Christian guys, having missed me and found out what had happened, turned up and asked if they could pray for me. They laid hands on me and prayed, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, give this man life!' That evening, I opened my eyes for the first time in six days. When I was told what had happened, I could not believe that God (if there was a God) would answer a prayer for a scumbag like me. Surely He would only be interested in good people.

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time in six days.**

That day was the beginning of a journey, notably via an Alpha Course, which led me to accept that there was a God and that He loved us so much – even people like me – that He sent Jesus to die for us. My life was soon to be totally transformed; it happened on 9th November 1996.

Not only was I set free from my addictions but I stopped swearing – I lost so many words from my vocabulary!

Crucially, Jesus had saved me again. He saved me from God's wrath; my sins were now forgiven. I started telling everyone about Jesus and I have been doing that for 25 years now.

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God's wrath; my sins were now forgiven.**

Gram's story is published in *One Step Beyond* by CWR

Christmas

2,000 years ago



Christmas is a time when my family – and all true followers of Jesus – celebrate His birth. Jesus, the Son of God, has always existed but, just over 2,000 years ago, He came from heaven to be born as a baby. It was the most momentous event in the whole of history.

At the age of about 33, Jesus was crucified, having been brutally beaten, tortured and humiliated. After three days He was raised to life again and, after forty days, returned to be with His Father in heaven.

Why did Jesus have to come and die? To save us from God's punishment. We have all sinned against God and deserve to be punished. But God sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin, which He did by dying and by coming back to life.

The Bible tells us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

But only those who receive Jesus into their life will be saved from God's punishment. God will forgive their sins and they will live with Him in heaven forever. But God will

punish all who reject Jesus. That will happen when Jesus returns to earth to judge every person who has ever lived.

It can be costly to put Jesus at the centre of our life. It almost certainly means giving up some of the things we enjoy – and possibly some of our relationships too. We may even face opposition from our family. And we will still encounter the disappointments, struggles and stresses that are a normal part of life. Our problems will not suddenly disappear.

But the cost of following Jesus is nothing compared with what we gain – a life of purpose and meaning now and peace from knowing that we will be safe with God forever.

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If you are ready to begin a new life with Jesus, you can do so by 'repenting', which means:

- confessing your sins to God and asking Him to forgive you, and
- turning your back on your old ways and, with God's help, starting to live His way.

To do that you can pray this prayer.

Dear Father God,

**I am really sorry for everything in my life,
past and present, which is not right. I want
to stop living that way. I want a new life.**

**Thank You for sending Jesus to die in my place,
in order to save me from the punishment which
I deserve. I want to live to please Jesus and to
make Him the centre of my life – to be my King.**

**So please forgive me and accept me as Your child.
Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit to help
me live this new life with Jesus.**

Amen

If you have prayed this prayer and been sincere, God welcomes you into His family as His child. Do not worry if you do not feel any different. It is important not to rely on your feelings but on God's promises in the Bible.

Tell a Christian leader or friend of your decision and ask them to help you to begin reading the Bible. It is also

important to meet with others who are followers of Jesus. They will help you as you begin your new life with Him.

If you still have questions, speak to a Christian you can trust or write to BeaconLight Trust. I encourage you 'not to sit on the fence' or just put off thinking through what I have written.

May God bless you. My life has been totally transformed by Jesus for 25 years now. I do hope that you will receive Him as your Saviour and allow Him to transform your life. You will never regret it.

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November 2021



Published by **BeaconLight**

in association with

Sowing Seeds Ministries

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