

I sought the Lord and He heard me.... Psalm 34:4

## Testimony of Oliver McAllister

The Truth is in the Bible!

My childhood home was a happy one. Like many Irish Catholic families, ours was large. There was nine of us: Mum and Dad, my six sisters and myself. We were close to each other and caring. But in 1970 into that happy home came a tragedy that was to change everything, for nothing would ever be the same again. I was only eleven years old and my father, a plumbing and heating engineer, needed to go out on his shift. I ran up the stairs and his door was slightly open and seeing his leg hanging over the edge of the bed I decided to give him a fright. 'Come on, Daddy I shouted, grabbing his leg 'its time you got up for work.' But his leg was heavy and cold. I knew right away what had happened. It was the day before Christmas, and my dad had died in his sleep.

We were strict Roman Catholics and all around our house were holy pictures and little crucifixes. It was to a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which hung above my bed, that I ran for help. With a broken heart I cried to the picture on the wall, sobbing the prayer that my daddy would come back to life again. I believed that when I would go back into his room and grab him by the leg, everything would be all right. He would jump up shouting, 'What are you at?' but that was not to be. Before I went downstairs to tell my mum and sisters, I paused and looked into my dad's face. I had known from a very early age that inside each one of us is a soul that leaves our bodies when we die. As I stared at his body, I knew with a certainty that my dad's soul had left his body. Where is he now? I wondered. Where is he now? Dad had been a 'good man', drink and bad language were not used in our home. His family was everything to him, and he associated with few outside of it. Has he gone to heaven? I asked myself is my dad away to be with God? But then an awful thought struck me what if he wasn't good enough to go to heaven. Where is he then? Could he have gone to hell I thought about hell and the kind of people who went there: murderers and people like that. No, I reasoned, no way would my dad go to hell. My dad was too good for hell.

So where had he gone? All our religious teaching told us the answer to that. Dad had gone to purgatory. We believed it was up to us to get him out of purgatory into heaven. And, because we loved him so much, we did all that we could. We said prayers for my dad. We paid for masses to be said for the good of his soul. And we put money into the chapel for his release. There was no way we wanted our dad to spend years and years in purgatory when our prayers and masses and money could get him out of there. Every now and then mum would give me an envelope to take to the priest, asking him to offer up the next mass for our dad. I took some money of my own when I went to the chapel, I would walk to the front beside the altar putting my money in the box, I would light a candle and pray to the statue of the Virgin Mary, fervent prayers that she would ask her Son to release my dad from purgatory.

A thought ate at my young heart where would I go if I died? Without a shadow of doubt I knew I wasn't 'good' enough to go to heaven. But, on the other hand, with all the good works I had done even as a little boy, I felt I wasn't 'bad' enough to go to hell. I lived with the knowledge that if I were to die I would go, like my dad, to purgatory. And there I would depend on my family's prayers, their money and their masses for my soul, if I were ever to be released and it was a frightening thought!

Although that troubled me off and on, most of the time I put it to the back of my mind and got on with my life. There were, however, occasions when the thought confronted me violently. If I saw a hearse passing, it brought me up short, and I found myself wondering if the person whose remains it was carrying had gone to heaven or hell or purgatory. Always that question where would I go if I died? On one occasion, when I saw a boy knocked down and killed, I was tortured with questions. Where was his soul? Fear had a big grip on my life. As a teenager I became an altar boy in the chapel, helping the priest with the mass. I thought if I helped him, went to mass and did good works, God would see the life I was leading and be pleased enough with me that he would take me to heaven. After all, I had been baptised as a baby, made my first communion when I was eight, and was confirmed a year or two after that. Surely, I decided, they were my tickets to heaven. But there was always a nagging doubt. I did my best, at least most of the time, but was my best good enough?

After leaving school I went to work for a Christian man who was not afraid to speak about his faith or his Saviour. He was a business man, and put up with no time-wasters. I remember one day he said he'd stand over me till I finished a job of work. And he did, as I worked, from 11am until 4pm, he talked to me about the things of God. His business was important to him but when the Lord's business needed to be done, that took priority. He told me I was a sinner who had come short of the glory of God. I had never heard language like that before. Only bad people were sinners, after all I didn't think I knew anyone who was really bad enough to be called a sinner! Good people who did wrong things were not sinners in my young mind. He told me how the Lord Jesus went to Calvary, there to die for sinners. My boss testified to his own faith and God's faithfulness. 'Oliver,' he concluded, 'I realised through someone witnessing to me, that I was a sinner before God and that the Lord Jesus stood, without stretched arms, waiting to forgive me for all my filthy dirty sins and receive me. I cried out from the depths of my heart and told him I was a sinner and that I wanted to be saved.'

This was all new to me. As much as I had gone to mass, to missions, to novenas, I had never heard the like. It seemed so right that I was almost persuaded. But, when I walked away from work that afternoon, it was as if the devil opened up my heart, lifted out the seed that had been sown, and threw it away. It was later, when I was working as a bus driver, that God was to speak to me again. He gave me such a concern for my soul that I went with my daughter, Lorraine, to a shrine at Mountmellery, in the south of Ireland. Thousands of people went there to see a statue of the Virgin Mary moving and to hear the statue speaking. Someone told me that they had seen the face of the Lord Jesus Christ there. It was with yearning of soul that I went. My daughter Lorraine and I stood at the statue on a winter's night in the pouring rain, praying the rosary from the depths of our hearts. I prayed and prayed but nothing happened. I went with one purpose in mind, to see the face of Jesus, but I left disappointed and disillusioned with my tears mingling with the rain on my face.

I used to watch people going to church on Sundays with their Bibles and wondered why I didn't have one, and why people going to the mass didn't need Bibles. Something in me yearned for God's word and I tried to find it in my missal, a little

Something in me yearned for God's word and I tried to find it in my missal, a littlebook with a mass for every day of the year but it left me frustrated as there was nothing in it to satisfy my needs.

Once again, I was confronted with the question that plagued me. A poor man who got on to my bus collapsed and died. Nothing could be done to save him. Having run to call an ambulance I came back and knelt down beside his body. Putting my mouth to his ear, I whispered, 'O my God, I'm very sorry for having sinned against thee because thou art good. With the help of grace I'll never sin again. 'I prayed that God would hear that prayer as if it came from the dead man's lips. Where was his soul? I asked myself, after the ambulance men had taken his body away. Had God heard that prayer? And the old question came back again to haunt me. Where would I go if I died? That very afternoon a toddler in a buggy on my bus choked on a sweet. Hearing her mum's screams I looked in the mirror and saw the child's purple face and terrified eyes. I dashed to the back of the bus, upturned the buggy, and slapped the wee thing on the back to dislodge the sweet. I was never so glad to hear a child cry in all my life. But that day left me deeply shaken, what was happening to me? I had come face to face with eternity twice in one day. And the question came back yet again. Where would I go if I died?

A short time later I was with Trevor Holmes, a fellow bus driver. He had lost his only son in an accident some time before. 'Trevor, tell me this,' I asked him...how did you ever get over the death of your boy?' 'The Lord helped me,' he replied.' And I knew from the way he said it that here was a man who knew God. I had religion, but Trevor had a relationship. I depended on rituals while he depended on the Lord Jesus Christ. That night, and every night for the following week, I traveled home on Trevor's bus and we talked. 'Oliver, have you got a Bible?' he asked one evening. I felt embarrassed and ashamed. 'Sure I've got a Bible,' but I had lied.

When I got off his bus that night, it was as though the Holy Spirit spoke right to me, telling me to get myself a Bible. As soon as I could the next day I went to a shop that sold 'holy' things. There were pictures of all the saints and statues of the Virgin Mary. Hanging on the walls were crucifixes on which was the figure of our Lord, with a trickle of blood painted on his hands, feet and side. I took a £10 note from my pocket and asked the woman in the shop 'Can I have a Bible, please?' 'I'm sorry,' she replied. 'We don't sell them!' You could have knocked me down with a feather. She gave me directions to a shop that would have one, and when I got there it was almost as if the Bible was reaching off the shelf to meet me. I went from the shop to pick up my bus and start my shift. Before my first run I sat in the driver's seat reading my Bible, my very own Bible. I remember my thoughts 'I'll read it as fast as I can and I'll get as much out of it as I'm able to and now I'm going to find out the truth!.

Sitting there on the bus I read the first five chapters of Genesis. Then I came to verse 3 of chapter 6. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man". The Holy Spirit used that to make me stop and think. It was only then that I realised that my bus was half full. People had given me money and I'd given them all sorts of tickets. I don't know how much change I gave them or if they got any at all. They must have wondered about me, thinking that I was so deep in the Bible that I could neither see nor hear what was going on round about me. God was speaking to me, telling me to watch myself, reminding me that he wasn't playing a game, and that I shouldn't play a game with my soul either, for I might lose. Putting the bus into gear I raced through my route to give me time at the other end to read some more. If the police had caught me that day I think I would have lost my license. I wasn't very long into my reading when I started to get lost. I couldn't wait to get on to Trevor's bus that night. (I've an apology to make to you,' I told him 'Remember you asked me if I had a Bible and I said I had? Well I hadn't but I was ashamed to admit it, and I didn't want you to be on top of me. When I got off your bus it was as though God told me to go and get one.'

Trevor's eyes filled up and I thought he was going to cry. 'That's amazing,' he said 'Last night when I went home I told Myrtle my wife about your conversation. Then I got down on my knees and prayed that God would show me what to say to you.' I told him what I'd been reading, and he pointed me to other verses about calling on God when he is near. [My heart was moved]

The devil had dragged me down over the previous months, and I let him do it as I smoked, drank nearly every night and had lost a fortune on bets. So bad did my drinking become that my wife, Deirdre, sat in the car waiting for me to get off the bus, just to stop me going to the pub. That night, when I got off Trevor's bus with my Bible, she looked at me hard. What's that she said, it's a Bible I replied. I told her I had bought it and I remember her reaction well. "Oliver, listen till I tell you something. You know what they say about people who read Bibles? They crack up and you're going to crack up, as if you're not bad enough the way you are just now". Things did change. The desire to go to the pub left me. I wanted to stay at home reading my Bible to and to find out the truth. Eventually I came to the part in John's Gospel where Nicodemus, a man much more religious than I ever was, asked the Lord Jesus just what I wanted to know. The Answer from Jesus, that we need to be born again. I didn't know what he meant, but the Lord went on to explain it. That I had been born of the flesh and I knew fine well, and I knew too that I had not been born of the Spirit. I read on and in John 6:37 I found Jesus' words, "...him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" and again in John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by me". What about all the prayers I've prayed to the saints? I asked myself and I concluded that either I was right and this Bible was wrong, or I was wrong and this Bible was right. And I was going to find out which was right!

Then one night, as I read in John's gospel of the Lord's crucifixion while Deirdre watched the television, tears started to run down my face, and I went upstairs and thought of his agony. Guilt overwhelmed me and I cried out to God for mercy. And right there and then the Lord saved me. That day, 3rd October 1989, I went to confession to the priest, the Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus. I cried sore and I prayed hard. I knew what Deirdre's reaction would be, and I was right. When I told her I was saved she looked at me as though I had two heads. Didn't I tell you if you started reading that Bible you'd crack up?' she shouted.

The devil gave us a hard time for the next year and a half and he did everything in his power to prevent our household salvation. Then one day Deirdre came to me when I arrived home from work with the Bible in her hand. 'What does this mean?' she asked. 'And what does that mean?' I told her that it was God's word and that I believed it. That very day my wife had a desire to go to a meeting at church, and while she was there she came to the Lord. It was not easy for her as her mother had threatened to disown her if that ever happened. But God overruled that situation and instead of disowning her, she accepted that Deirdre had made up her mind and that it instead of disowning her, she accepted that Deirdre had made up her mind and that it couldn't be changed. And then came the best of all birthday presents when our daughter, Lorraine, was converted on my birthday on our way home from a meeting we had attended together. What the devil had fought against the Lord did.

My testimony does not end with my conversion and the conversion of the ones I lovemost in this world. It is an ongoing thing and I can testify to God's goodness day byday and hour by hour. May all the glory and the praise be His. If God has spoken toyou though this Testimony and you are concerned about your soul or would likefurther help... [Please phone 01849479448 or Email [openairs@aol.com](mailto:openairs@aol.com)]

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