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**ALISON'S STORY**

**ALISON FENNING**

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# MY STORY

It was 1997. I was in Uganda, travelling along a red dusty road in a minibus and beginning to question my sanity; was it not a moment of madness when I signed up for this trip? I was clear about my motives; I really did want to serve in a poor community. At the same time, I held many fears about the month ahead.

I was unsure how I would cope with the scorching heat and without electricity, running water and flush toilets. Would I like the food; more importantly, would my stomach? And I was concerned about the mosquitoes and other bugs, not to mention the possibility of encountering snakes. And then there was the question of how I would fit in with the team – there were twelve of us.

But I was also excited. I had read about mission trips like this as a child and dreamt that one day I would be able to go on one. But with the way my life turned out, it was never likely to happen. That I was actually here was a real miracle.



Although there were times when I felt quite unsettled for various reasons, I enjoyed a generally happy childhood with Mum and Dad and my brother. I have memories of my brother and I going out on our bikes together, Dad having taught us to ride when we were really young. Sadly, in my earlier years, my school attendance was quite erratic, partly because of bouts of ill health and partly because, as a family, we moved around quite a bit.

But the memory of my childhood that overshadows all others is one that I really wanted to forget. I was just seven. I found myself as the only girl amongst a group of boys in a shed. I cannot recall exactly what happened between me and two boys – one my age and one quite a few years older – but I will never forget my parents’ reaction. I received a massive ‘telling off’ and a ban from going out to play – which seemed to last for ages.

Far more significant was my shock and fear at the time and, then, the ongoing impact upon my life. That only emerged years later, when I began to realise how the incident had made me very vulnerable to wanting to please people and caused me to make unwise decisions.



**... the incident made me**

**very vulnerable to wanting**

**to please people ...**

Although the experience remained lurking in the back of my mind, it did not prevent me from enjoying family life, especially after we moved from the Midlands to Bournemouth, with the great attraction of its beach. But when I was sixteen, now quite feisty, and with my parents moving house again, I decided that it was time to get my own place and my independence.

I started work as a dental nurse and one Friday night I experienced the ritual of 'after work drinks'. I had lived a sheltered life and this was my introduction to alcohol. And it was love at first taste! I felt amazing after that first drink. It brought up in me the emotion of feeling loved. I remember saying to myself, 'I really like this. I am going to have a lot of it.' My relationship with alcohol began that night – and it would not end any time soon!

**... it was love at first taste!**



But I longed for a relationship in which I would be secure and experience genuine, mutual love. Yet, vulnerable as I was, all the guys I encountered desired one thing and offered nothing more. That caused me to strengthen the relationship that was working – my relationship with alcohol. Alcohol made me ‘feel good’; ‘feeling good’ is what I viewed as love.

**Alcohol made me ‘feel good’;**

**‘feeling good’ is what**

**I viewed as love.**

After about two years in that job, my childhood dream to go on a mission trip began to stir in me. I knew about Christianity; I had attended church occasionally. So, I decided to apply to a Bible College. I was gutted by their response; they questioned whether I really did have a calling from God. Devastated, I became even more reliant on my relationship with alcohol.

It would go from strength to strength. I didn’t want it to ever end, not that I was in control anyway. Alongside the clubbing and partying, other things took hold of me, of which I am now ashamed. I absolutely hated



myself; in an attempt to cope, I started to punish myself. I became obsessed with exercise and with watching my calories. I ate as little as possible so that I could drink as much as possible. At one point, I weighed less than seven stone.

**I absolutely hated myself.**

**I started to punish myself.**

I was in a very dark place but a glimmer of light appeared, although I didn't welcome it at the time. It came in the form of Zvart, a dentist, who joined the practice where I was working. I was taken aback by her announcement that she was a Christian. How arrogant, I thought.

I immediately determined not to let her infect me with any God stuff. As far as I was concerned, He had failed me. Why did He not protect me as a 7-year-old when I was with those boys? And surely He was responsible for blocking my entry to Bible College. And now, my parents had divorced and I was quite happy to blame God for that as well.

But, strangely, Zvart and I did have something in common, despite our vastly contrasting lifestyles.



(By now it was more than 10 years since alcohol had got me into its grip.) We were both excited by the thought of overseas mission trips. For me, it was a dream I had left behind; Zvart was fulfilling hers.

Because of that common interest and her gentle care, kindness and hospitality, I began to study the Bible with her. And it set me thinking, 'Could there possibly be a way back from the life I was living?' I was now drinking so heavily that I was barely able to function. I was also full of anger – rage would be a better word. Occasionally, I would even turn up for work in an unfit state. Inevitably, my job came to an end.

**'Could there possibly be a way  
back from the life I was living?'**

Early one morning, after one of the very worst of benders, I thought to myself as I looked in the mirror, 'I really don't recognise who I am any longer.' I called my Mum, although so intoxicated that she would not have understood anything that I was babbling. Yet, I believe that conversation sparked the change that was about to come – very slowly. I can only recall her



warning, 'You need Jesus in your life; otherwise, it will come to an end.' Then she prayed for me.

## 'You need Jesus in your life'

**After I came off the phone, I also prayed. Down on my knees, I cried out, 'God, if you are real, please sort my life out.'**

The next Sunday, I decided to go to church. I just wanted to hear what the preacher had to say. But not in the best of shape for the morning service, I opted for the evening service – before going on to a night club. That became my routine for Sunday evenings; the 'God club', then the night club.

I was horrified when the vicar announced that he wanted to meet up. I was in a very controlling relationship and the house was an absolute tip – in almost as big a mess as my life. But he was insistent and the reason for his visit soon became clear. He hadn't come to condemn me, as I feared, but to ask me to join a mission trip to Uganda. I couldn't believe it! He thought the break would help me: I thought he was mad for inviting me. But I was sure he was right – I was convinced it would help me.



**... a mission trip to Uganda -**

**I couldn't believe it!**

And so, three months later I was in that minibus on that red dusty road in Uganda. What a great trip it proved to be. I loved being able to serve the community through helping to build houses and being able to encourage people through visits to their homes and churches. I expected that. What I didn't expect was the opportunity to preach for the very first time!

But what made the trip really special was the fact that I felt I belonged within that group - that I was accepted. That was a new experience for me. And I knew the reason: it was that prayer I had prayed. God was real and had set about sorting out my life; it was about to change completely. I was convinced that the trip was part of His plan and I was sure there would be several more trips. I was excited.

**God was real and had set about**

**sorting out my life ...**



On returning home. I finished the relationship with the guy to whom I was engaged. I was now embarking on a new relationship – with Jesus. I started helping with the youth work in the church. I left my job, gave up my flat and moved in with some friends, who would be supportive in my new life as a Christian.

Although I managed to cut down on my drinking, it was only six years later that I was set free from the addiction. During a visit to the US, a lady prayed for me, asking God to release me from the craving I still had – and He did. Since that day I have detested even the smell of alcohol.

The highlight of my new journey was my baptism – in the sea – conducted by Zvart’s husband, Nick. It signalled, not that I had simply changed, but that I was a new person. To use the term the Bible uses, I had been ‘born again’. To explain why I was baptised, let me share just a little about Jesus’ story.

**... I was a new person ...**

**I had been ‘born again’**



# JESUS' LIFE

There is no other story like His. Being the Son of God, He has always existed. Not only was He there when the world was created, but He created everything. But just over 2,000 years ago, He left heaven to come to earth, where He had the humblest of beginnings: He was born in a stable to a virgin.

There was nothing special about Jesus' childhood or His early adult life. Then, at the age of about 30, He chose twelve men to train to be His 'associates' or disciples. For three years, they travelled around Israel, drawing great crowds. Jesus performed healings and miracles and taught the people how God wanted them to live. He always had time for people, especially the sick, the poor and the outcasts of society.

But He didn't have much time for the religious leaders, who were self-righteous and looked down upon others. Jesus saw them as hypocrites, who observed lots of petty rules but lacked genuine love, compassion and care for others.

Their dislike of Jesus turned to hatred and they



plotted how they could get rid of Him. Eventually, they had Him arrested on false accusations of blasphemy. It led to a most brutal and horrific death by crucifixion – the greatest miscarriage of justice in history.

Surely God could have prevented it. So, what went wrong? Nothing. God sent Jesus to earth for that very purpose – to die for our sins. Jesus willingly sacrificed His own life, paying the penalty for our sin, so that we might be ‘born again’. It was the greatest act of love ever.

**Jesus willingly sacrificed**

**His own life, paying the**

**penalty for our sin ...**

**Sin is our rebellious and disobedient nature with which we are born; it causes us to want to live our own way and disregard God’s rules. It separates us from God.**

God hates all sin. That includes pride, jealousy, envy, lying, anger, hatred, evil thoughts, sexual immorality and so many other things, as well as the breaking of any of the Ten Commandments.



**... the wages of sin is death,  
but the gift of God is eternal  
life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**The Bible - Romans 6:23**

**Words of Jesus**

**... no one can see the  
kingdom of God unless  
they are born again.**

**The Bible - John 3:3**

God demands justice, and that means there must be a punishment for our sin. But Jesus took the punishment in our place, so that we don't have to.

The greatest ever miracle followed two days after Jesus' crucifixion: He was raised from the dead. Forty days later, He was taken up to heaven to be with His Father.



One day, Jesus will return to earth to judge everyone who has ever lived. There will be no warning; the Bible tells us that He will come unexpectedly, like a 'thief in the night'<sup>1</sup>.

All who have repented of their sin, and accepted Jesus as their Saviour, will live with Him in heaven forever. But all who have rejected Jesus will be punished.

**All who have ... accepted Jesus  
as their Saviour will live with  
Him in heaven forever.**

<sup>1</sup>The Bible - Matthew 24:42-44



# MY REAL PROBLEM

When I understood why Jesus had to die, I knew that my real problem was sin. Alcohol was killing me physically and emotionally but, spiritually, I was already dead; I was dead the day I was born. Like everyone else, I was born with a sinful nature.

**... my real problem was sin...**

**spiritually I was already dead;**

**I was dead the day I was born ...**

My baptism symbolised that I had put my old life to death and had taken on a new life in Christ. I was making a public statement that I had been 'born again' by:

- accepting that I deserved to be punished on account of my sin,
- believing that only Jesus could rescue me from God's punishment,



- confessing the wrong things in my life and repenting of them, that is, turning away from them,
- deciding to live to please God as a follower of Jesus.

I was safe from God's judgement for He had forgiven all my sins – past, present and future – because I believed that Jesus had taken the punishment for them.

**I was safe from God's judgement**

**... He had forgiven all my sins ...**

I was now God's child and a member of His family. And I wanted to serve Him – in Africa, if possible.

## **AFRICA**

It was possible; God made it possible. My love of Africa and its people had replaced my love of alcohol. I knew that I needed to be properly equipped to serve effectively. I applied to All Nations Christian College and I was immediately accepted. I still remember



the response, 'We definitely think you are called by God.' I studied there for three years.

**My love of Africa and its**

**people had replaced my**

**love of alcohol.**

I have lost count of the number of visits I have now made to Africa, some with my husband. I am amazed by what God has enabled me to do, especially in supporting the poor and the vulnerable, and in setting up several ministries.

Here in the UK, a major role has been supporting women caught up in prostitution and addiction, acting in a chaplaincy capacity.



# WHAT ABOUT YOUR STORY?

As you have chosen to read about my life, you may be able to identify with what I have experienced. Or perhaps your life has run far more smoothly than mine. Whatever your story, one thing is certain – you have a problem with sin, as everyone has.

But most people don't see 'everyday sin' as a problem. They believe that, if there is life after death and such a place as heaven, God will accept them for one of many reasons: some because they have been baptised or christened; some because they attend church; some because they do their best to obey the Ten Commandments; some because they were born into a Christian family; and many because they believe they do far more good than bad.

But the Bible is clear: sin is our greatest problem, for it is a barrier which separates us from God – and only Jesus can remove it.



Words of Jesus

**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

**The Bible - John 14:6**

What do you think? Do you believe that the Bible is God's Word and must be true? Are you ready to receive Jesus into your life?

It is not a decision to be taken lightly. It may mean giving up some of the things you enjoy – and, possibly, friends too. And you will still encounter the disappointments, struggles and stresses that are a normal part of life. I certainly have.

But what you give up for a new life with Jesus is nothing compared with what you will gain – real purpose, meaning, contentment and peace and the promise of everlasting life with Him.

If you think you are ready to make this decision, look back at the statement that I was making by being baptised (on page 18). Are those four things true



for you? If so, you can ask Jesus to come into your life by praying this simple prayer.

**Dear Father God,**

**Please help me right now as I really want to change.**

**I do believe that Jesus Christ is your Son. And I believe that He died to take the punishment for everything that I have done to offend you, so that You will forgive me.**

**I am sorry for all my sinful actions, thoughts and words. Please forgive me and accept me as Your child.**

**Amen**

If you have prayed this prayer and been sincere, God welcomes you into His family as His child. All your sins – past, present and future – are forgiven. Like me, you are a new person.



Don't 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.

You will need support as you begin this new life. If you know someone who is a true follower of Jesus, ask them to help you. Perhaps you are not ready to make a decision. If you have questions, I encourage you to speak to a Christian you know or write to BeaconLight Trust who have worked with me to publish this booklet.

But please do not 'sit on the fence' or close your mind to what is the most important issue we all have to face; it will be too late when Jesus returns from heaven to judge everyone. We do not know when that will be.

I have never regretted the decision I made more than 27 years ago. If you decide to follow Jesus yourself, as I do hope you will, I know you will never regret it either.

May God bless you.

*Alison Fenning*

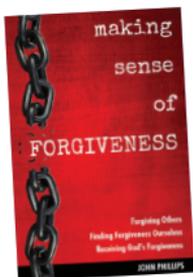
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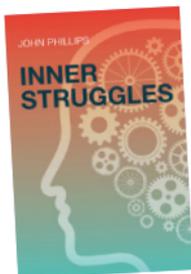
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**In *Now Free*, Alison Fenning shares how God set her free from an addiction to alcohol extending over 16 years – and how He then enabled her to fulfil her childhood dream.**

Her passion now is to see people encounter God's love and power through knowing Jesus Christ.

Through their ministry ([missiononthemove.co.uk](http://missiononthemove.co.uk)), Alison and her husband equip people around the world for missional leadership, as well as overseeing projects in poorer communities.

Alison is also an Associate Pastor with New Life Family Church in Suffolk.

She has written several books, including *Walking with God* and *Lift up Your Head*.

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