



NOW FREE **from the love of money** 

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# NOW FREE SIMON'S STORY

### SIMON PINCHBECK

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#### **MY STORY**

I was born in Burton-on-Trent, most famously known for its long history in the brewing industry. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was home to nine breweries and it has retained that tradition.

I have few happy memories of Burton, for I missed out on the one thing that every child most needs from their parents – love. It wasn't a good start for me, for I didn't know my father. And neither my stepdad (whom I acquired when I was four) nor my mum showed me any love. Possibly they did love me but there was no evidence of it and I grew up with a hard heart – like granite. Rows and fights were a regular feature of family life. My young sister had severe disabilities and, understandably, needed more attention than my younger brother and me. But that was no excuse.

... I grew up with a

hard heart - like granite.



In my teens, I began to hang around one of the town's many pubs with my mates. I took pleasure in playing my part in supporting the brewing industry. But I never allowed my drinking to get out of hand.

As far as school was concerned, my only real interest was the physical activities. I developed a love for sport, especially rugby, eventually representing the county at both under-19 and under-21 level. It hurt me that my stepdad never came to watch me, although by then I had got used to his lack of interest in me.

I had no idea what I wanted to do when I left school – until I became gripped by The Sweeney, the 1970s TV police drama. It featured the Flying Squad, which was set up to tackle armed robbery and violent crime in London. The Sweeney determined my future and I was in the Met by the time I was 19 – sadly, as a uniformed copper on the beat rather than in the Flying Squad.

I served in different boroughs before moving to Central London, and then joining the Territorial Support Group, which was the nearest thing to a riot squad. The TSG would be the first unit to tackle any serious disorder.

A uniformed police officer was the dream job for me. I loved it and I was always well respected wherever I served. My physical build – I was well over 6ft – helped me gain that respect.

When I grew an enormous moustache, I became 'the walrus' to my colleagues and friends – and, also, to those whom I wouldn't call friends, notably the football hooligans. And Highbury, the home of Arsenal, became my territory. I spent ten years there and became well acquainted with the troublemakers. Needless to say, the violence rose to a new level whenever a London club visited. With our truncheons, we were never fearful. I thought of myself as Superman; in my uniform, I felt I was invincible.

#### ... in my uniform,

#### I felt I was invincible.

But on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1982, I felt anything but invincible. The visitors were West Ham and amongst their supporters were members of the notorious Inter City Firm. We sensed that it was going to get very nasty that afternoon and we were right. When the fighting started, I was the first officer to go into the crowd.

Wielding my truncheon, I managed to stave off my attackers. That evening, I realised how lucky I was; I knew that I could have been seriously injured or even killed. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ensued.

This was just three weeks before I was to marry Lynda. Sadly, my marriage, and then our two sons – Tom and Jamie – were never a priority. The truth is that I didn't know how to love them – or anyone. I gave all my time to my job, to socialising, and to sport, especially rugby. Eventually, I walked out on Lynda, at a time when her mother was terminally ill with cancer and, of course, leaving her with responsibility for our boys too. That shows you how selfish I was.

#### ... I didn't know how to love...

My football duties absorbed a great deal of my time. I began working with an intelligence unit, operated through Scotland Yard, which monitored the football hooligans who descended upon London on Saturday afternoons.

One night, I got into a serious fight in a club with an off-duty policeman, resulting in a serious assault

charge. I expected the charge would be dropped but it wasn't. Fifteen months later, I went on trial at Woolwich Crown Court, feeling more vulnerable than I ever did on the terraces at Highbury armed with my truncheon. It was an enormous relief to hear the 'not guilty' verdict at 4pm on the Friday. The verdict would almost certainly have been different without the support of my GP and psychiatrist; both gave evidence regarding my depression and PTSD.

Within a week I had a call from a senior officer asking how I saw my future. With 23 years' service under my belt, I knew that it was time to move on from the police. My decision was accepted without any attempt to persuade me to stay; that officer also knew it was time for me to move on! I left with a good conduct medal. That hardly compensated for what I was leaving behind; I was a team player and the camaraderie within the police had meant everything to me.

... it was time to move on from the police.



I began to fill part of the day with a two to three-hour routine in the gym. I envied the lifestyle that many of the other guys there enjoyed. They had plenty of money, nice cars and they attracted pretty women. I was convinced that it was just the lifestyle that I needed to be truly happy.

Once they knew they could trust me, they invited me to work with them. Initially, it was just low-level debt collecting but other, more lucrative, work followed. Big money – and I mean big – came my way. I was able to buy the smartest clothes, dine at the finest restaurants, and indulge in the most luxurious holidays. At last, I found the capacity to love – but only money.

### At last, I found the capacity to

#### love - but only money.

I became obsessed with the need for money; I had no reason to think that it would wreck my life. (I know now what the Bible says about the love of money – that it's the root of all evil.¹) The more I



had, the more I wanted. An example was the shiny black 4.7 litre Cherokee Jeep with blacked-out windows that I bought. I loved it – until, a few months later, I just had to trade it in for the latest model.

And so I pestered the guys for more work without being too choosy about what was offered. Obviously, we ensured that our 'trading' did not come under scrutiny of the Office of Fair Trading! My eyes lit up the day they invited me to invest in a 'scheme' that was going to produce 'an amazing return'. But then my eyes almost filled with tears the day I realised I had been scammed. My dream of being really rich and happy was shattered. I was filled with anger, resentment and bitterness. I sank to a new low.

# My dream of being really rich and happy was shattered.

One Saturday afternoon, I was leaving the gym when I glanced at a guy on one of the running machines. He was different from everyone else. You could

see that he was content with life. I don't know how to describe it, other than to say that he had an incredible peace shining out of him. What made it more amazing was his past; he had been one of the most violent men I have ever known. On one occasion, he slashed the face of a customer in his pub, leaving him with an enormous scar.

I went across and told him, 'I need something of what you've got.' Later, Johnny and I met for coffee. He explained that we had encountered each other on many occasions: I had often chased him across the terraces at Highbury! He shared how his life had changed dramatically by his faith in Jesus. It was remarkable to hear that Mark, the man he had attacked in his pub, had also become a 'born again' Christian and they were now good mates.

He invited me to his church. I never expected to find myself going to church, but I was willing to give it a go. I was very nervous as I made my way to Holy Trinity Brompton in London – on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2002. I discovered that my perception of church, and of Christians, was wide of the mark. The church was full of normal people – people like me – and I didn't spot a single pair of sandals; in my imagination, real Christians all wore sandals!

### I never expected to find myself

### going to church...

What struck me most was the message from the preacher, Revd Nicky Gumbel; it seemed that it was prepared specially for me, although he had no idea that I would be there. Afterwards, he came and explained, very simply, the heart of the Christian faith:

- we have all sinned against God and deserve His punishment,
- God is holy and just and cannot simply ignore our sin; it has to be punished,
- because He loves us, God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to take the punishment for us;
   Jesus did that when He was crucified.
- God forgives, and welcomes into His family, everyone who –
  - firstly, *believes* on Jesus, trusting Him for the forgiveness of their sin, and secondly, *repents* changing their mind about their old way of life and choosing to start living to please Jesus.

I was faced with a huge decision when Nicky Gumbel asked me whether I wanted to accept the new life that Christ offers. And yet, I didn't have to think about it. I was sick of the life I was living and couldn't wait to repent of it; I now knew it was never going to give me the peace I longed for. I knew, too, that I needed to be forgiven – and I wanted to be forgiven. He led me in a prayer. I can't remember the exact words but, in essence, I prayed:

#### **Heavenly Father,**

Please forgive me for all the hurt I have caused in my life.

I turn away from that life and now accept Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Saviour from this day forward.

**Amen** 

It was such a simple prayer and yet they were the most powerful words I had ever spoken. That moment I was filled with an inner peace and it was because

I had peace with God. And I knew what that meant – that I would be safe when Jesus returns to judge us all. I had no need to fear that judgment; Jesus had taken all my guilt upon Himself. I knew that life would be radically different from now on.

At 45, I was at last free from that hard, granite-like heart. I had discovered the most amazing love – God's love. I now had a Father – a Father in heaven, God Himself – who loved me so much that He had sent Jesus to die in my place.

## I had discovered the most

#### amazing love - God's love ...

And now that I was experiencing God's love, I was able to love others. A first step was to get back with Lynda. I didn't deserve it but she kindly accepted me back. Eight years later, we renewed our wedding vows.

Not once have I ever regretted praying that prayer back in 2002. More than 20 years later I am still not perfect! One day, I will be – when I am with Jesus. There was a dramatic change in me at the time;

the love of money and the love of drink both left me and I stopped swearing. And I immediately became a much friendlier, more tolerant and less selfish person. But the one real struggle that persisted for a while was 'road rage'. When cut up by another driver, I would often respond with ungodly thoughts – and sometimes words but never 'God bless you'!

# I am still not perfect! One day, I will be – when I am with Jesus.

But I know that when we do fail, if we are genuinely sorry and confess our failure, then Jesus takes us in His loving arms and embraces us, and encourages us as we continue our walk with Him. It is mindblowing to think that Jesus, the Son of God, is a faithful friend to everyone who chooses to live for Him.

And for the last 22 years, what I have really enjoyed more than anything else is telling my story – hence this short booklet. I want to encourage others to accept Jesus as their friend for this life and for eternity.

These verses from the Bible confirmed to me what Nicky Gumbel explained.

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

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17

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

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1a



#### YOUR STORY

That's my story – in the smallest of nutshells. What's your story? Have you yet to discover God's love? Perhaps you have enjoyed what I missed out on – loving parents and a loving home. And you may have avoided the sort of decisions that have caused me so much pain, regret and guilt. Possibly, too, life may be pretty good for you and you don't see any need of God. Or maybe it is quite the opposite – you may be in an even bigger mess than I was.

Whatever your circumstances, if you are living without God in your life, two things are certain. Firstly, you are missing out on the truly fulfilled life that God intends for us all – a life in relationship with Him, who created us. Secondly, the Bible is very clear that there is life beyond death and you will face God's judgment. One day Jesus will return to judge us.

One day Jesus will return



to judge us.

And if we have rejected God, the verdict will be 'guilty'. We all have a sinful nature that is offensive to Him. By His standard, every one of us has sinned and continues to sin. Jesus taught that envy, hatred, lust, lying and cheating are all sins, alongside the many obvious ones. The greatest sin is living to please ourselves, without any thought of God.

It makes no difference where we might place ourselves on a scale alongside the best and worst of people. It counts for nothing that we might be better than most people; it is God's standard that matters and we all fall desperately short of that. Whilst He is merciful, He cannot simply turn a blind eye to our sin; it has to be punished.

He (God) cannot simply turn

a blind eye to our sin;

it has to be punished.

This is where God's love comes in. He sent Jesus into the world to take the punishment that we deserve.

Jesus did that when He willingly surrendered His life

and suffered that horrendously agonising death by crucifixion. And so we have to decide who will take the punishment for our sin: Jesus or ourselves? Who will take the punishment for *your* sin: Jesus or yourself? If Jesus, then God will have no case against you; He will forgive you, counting you 'not guilty' because Jesus has paid the penalty on your behalf. And you will be welcomed into God's family and you will live with Him forever.

#### Who will take the punishment

for your sin: Jesus or yourself?

It is wrong to think that God only welcomes 'good' people; God's forgiveness is for everyone who asks for it, regardless of the life they have lived. But He will reject everyone who rejects Jesus; for those, the Bible warns of an awful day of judgment when Jesus returns.

God's forgiveness is for





### **But He will reject**

#### everyone who rejects Jesus ...

If you choose to follow Jesus, you will almost certainly have to give up some of the things you enjoy – and, no doubt, some friends will drift away. And you will still encounter the disappointments, struggles and stresses that are a normal part of life. But what you will lose is nothing compared with what you will gain – real purpose, meaning and contentment in this life and the promise of everlasting life with Him.

Do you wish to exchange your current way of life for a completely new life as a follower of Jesus? If so, you can pray the same prayer that I did (on page 14) – perhaps using your own words and perhaps with the help of a Christian friend.

If you do and you genuinely mean it, you will become part of God's family as His child. All your sins – past, present and future – will be forgiven. You will be a new person, just as I have been since 2002.

You may not feel any different, for it is important not to rely on your feelings but on God's promises in the Bible. You will know the inner change that has taken place and it will soon be evident to others that you are a new person. Don't be afraid to tell them why!

If you have taken this step, 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. Alternatively, please contact BeaconLight Trust.

Perhaps you are not ready to decide just now. If you have questions, I encourage you to speak to a Christian you know or write to BeaconLight who have worked with me to publish this booklet. But please do not put off your decision by 'sitting on the fence'; it will be too late when Jesus comes back to earth. We do not know when that will be.

The day I decided to follow Jesus as my Saviour will always be the best day of my life – until I see Him face to face.

May God bless you.









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From Cop to Criminal to Christ.

After 23 years in the police, Simon turned to a life of organised crime, chasing money with no limit.

For a time, he enjoyed the life that money brought but it failed to truly satisfy him and give him the peace he desired. That only came when his life was radically transformed by Jesus.

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