

voice
to empower
men for life



Delivered
from
Drink

Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International



Delivered from Drink and Drugs

Steve Downes, Cromer, Norfolk

I was born in Norfolk and brought up in Cromer. My maternal grandparents were Christians, but my parents weren't. As a result, I developed a pretty strong aversion to Christianity. I used to harangue my Christian friends about their beliefs, and try to convert them to my atheism. Once, after

a session in the pub, I burst into Cromer Church and disrupted the midnight Christmas Eve service before being gently led away.

Drink featured very heavily in my life. I was regularly drunk from the age of 15. At the age of 18 I got a job as a trainee reporter at the Eastern Daily Press, which gave me more

money to drink more. For the next few years I spent weekends on football, alcohol, soft drugs and trying my luck with as many women as possible. My 'moral' code was simple – enjoy every minute and live life for yourself.

Things began to change when I was 23. I met a beautiful woman called Yolande. I fell deeply in love with her, and within a month had moved into her house to live with her and her two children, Molly and Robbie. At this point I certainly began to clean up my act, cutting down on drink and giving up smoking. But my feelings about Christianity hadn't changed – it was still a load of rubbish!

We quickly decided to get married, and I inexplicably insisted on a church wedding, which raised a few eyebrows. Yoly had been married before and she insisted that we attend the church for a couple of months beforehand so we didn't look like hypocrites. I hated those mornings. I was missing out on Sunday football.

In May 1998 we were married – and I stopped going to church. One morning we received an invitation to go on an introductory course to Christianity called 'Alpha' in Cromer. To my horror, Yoly said she wanted to attend. She said if I wouldn't take her, she'd go with her Christian friend

Sara. I wasn't having that, so I told her I'd go along to keep an eye on her. I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to convert a few misguided Christians on to my path of unrighteousness!

But, without alcohol, I was too much of a coward to disrupt proceedings. In fact, if I'm honest, I quite enjoyed our weekly sessions which I found

stimulating. By now Yoly was expecting our first child. Halfway through the pregnancy we were told our baby had cystic fibrosis. We wept tears of despair as we tried to take it all in. A follow-up scan showed that

he was a boy, and confirmed the awful news. We were faced with the dilemma of whether to have a termination. The hospital made it clear that this was the most 'humane' choice, and we eventually agreed.

We went to hospital to say goodbye to our little boy. The Consultant sat us down and asked us one last time: "Do you want to go ahead with this?" At exactly the same time, Yoly and I replied: "No!" We then realised that we both thought the other had wanted a termination, when in fact neither of us did. The relief as we drove home was immeasurable.

The next session of the Alpha course answered the question "Does God Heal Today?" At the end Tim Mitchell – the Anglican curate – asked if he could pray for our unborn

Halfway through the pregnancy we were told our baby had cystic fibrosis. We wept tears of despair as we tried to take it all in.

baby. Yoly agreed, and I skulked in the background feeling a bit uncomfortable. As Tim prayed, Yoly felt an intense heat in her tummy and womb, and was very tearful.

We had no concept of the power of God, but when we went for our next hospital scan the doctors were dumbfounded – there was no sign of the cystic fibrosis. Our little boy had been healed!

A few nights later, I had a strange dream in which Yoly and I were arguing about what to call our baby. I was arguing for Ezekiel, a name I had never heard of. I told Tim

about the dream and he said Ezekiel was the name of an Old Testament prophet, and it meant ‘strength of God’. It seemed so appropriate, but a bit of a weird name for a little lad.

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We realised at last that God was talking to us, and decided to call our son Ezekiel. When Alpha ended, we felt empty. We decided that we wanted to give our lives to Jesus, and went round to Tim’s house and made a

commitment. It was a wonderful time that I shall never forget. To be saved by the grace of God is awesome, especially after I had insulted his children and mocked his name.

Two months later Ezekiel was born, completely free of cystic fibrosis, a happy, healthy little baby. We have gone on with God in the last seven years, having many ups and downs. But God has been our Rock. He has dealt with my alcohol problems, cleaned me up, given me a beautiful wife, two lovely stepchildren, and two little boys of my own – Ezekiel and Noah.

In all this I have discovered the height, width and depth of God’s amazing love for me. How great is our God!



Steve Downes is a Reporter with The Eastern Daily Press in Norfolk.



A Fantastic Deal

John Jones, Malaga, Spain

I was born in a small mining village in Monmouthshire, South Wales. I had a good Christian upbringing, my father and grandfather were both Baptist local preachers. We moved to London when I was eight and I continued attending the local Anglican church.

On leaving school at 15, I joined the Royal Navy where I developed a passion for women, wine and foreign

travel. After the Navy I entered the travel industry, said goodbye to blighty and started my travels. These took me on the Orient Express from Paris to Istanbul; on the Trans Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok; on the Blue Train from Johannesburg to Capetown, to name a few.

I have visited the world's largest shrine at Angkor Wat, Cambodia; The Khyber Pass, India's route to the North West; Benares, the holy city on

the banks of the Ganges; Nigeria, Japan and China. The world was my oyster!

Through my travels and the people I met, I came to believe that with compassion and understanding I could find happiness and love. I became a Buddhist for forty years and found compassion and understanding, but love always eluded me.

On retiring to live in Spain I fell in love with an Angel, but my eyes were closed and I did not listen so my angel walked away. Full of bitterness I started drinking, blaming all but myself! Then my dear mother, who had lived in Spain for many years, became very ill with cancer. I had to pull myself together to look after my mum.

When my mother died I realised that something was missing in my life. It was then that I met two more angels, Bruce Wick and his wife Caroline. Bruce and I had a lot in common. Gently they reintroduced me to the joys of Christianity. I am sure that at times they were both exasperated by my attitude but this time my eyes were open and I was listening!

It was only when attending the Malaga FGBMFI dinner and listening to John Wright's story, watching the healing miracles and observing the

sincerity of others, that I felt I had reached an irreversible point in my life! I had already been struck, when I arrived at the restaurant, by the happiness and love of the people there. I knew that at last I had found what had been eluding me all these years.

The rest is history. Two days later I met with John again. We talked and I

surrendered what is left of my life to God. I received forgiveness for my wasted past and invited the Holy Spirit into my heart. I was born again! When John laid his hands on me that night my heart was full of

bitterness. Since receiving the Holy Spirit the bitterness has now gone. A few days later I was baptised in the sea and filled with joy.

Already the Lord has shown me His power. I gave fifty euros for my first year's subscription. The next day I bought fifty euros worth of groceries from a supermarket. However the till jammed so the manager said it was store policy to give free groceries if they were unable to take the money! As Jesus said, "Give and it will be given unto you...!" I gave Jesus what is left of the fag end of my life and I have got back eternal life. Can anyone refuse such a fantastic deal?

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John Jones is a member of the Malaga Group.

Simple Prayers, Surprising Answers

**Michael Wiltshire,
Norwich**



You may be surprised to hear it, but I'm amazed at the way the power of God can break into ordinary people's lives.

I have experienced this – not only in secular work as a senior journalist with one of the world's great newspapers, but also in my life as a follower of Jesus.

Today, I find it hard to believe that my adventures have taken me to 50 nations. Also, after 30 years in the media, I believe that the Bible is more up-to-date than tomorrow's newspaper, especially as we watch the way that world events are unfolding in the light of Bible prophecies.

People have often asked me if I find a conflict between being a Christian and a journalist? But despite much

criticism of the media, I've known many good writers whose work has been enhanced because of their great respect for the facts – the unvarnished *truth*.

Looking back on my journey to faith in Christ, there were at least three times in my life when I prayed what, at the time, seemed a simple prayer, which God answered in an astonishing way.

Yes, I have been 'caught off-guard' by a mighty God who loves to surprise us, even when our faith is small.

Let me highlight just three prayers that had a life-changing effect on me.

'Oh God, help me!'

The **first prayer** was a cry for help: as a youngster – who was very self-conscious, with sticking-out ears and an embarrassing stammer. I was

fortunate to win a scholarship to a public school in the west of England. Sport was important there, but I wasn't a great rugby player – yet I *could* run cross-country. I just ran – and kept on going!

You see, by contrast, my dad had been a gifted athlete, having won 50 trophies in track events. And at 16, I wanted so much for him to be proud of me by winning my 'running colours'. So, when we students set off on an exhausting 20-mile race over Exmoor, I was determined to keep going at all costs, even if it crippled me.

As I battled through the pain barrier, I remember gasping repeatedly:

"Oh, God, *please* help me!". I really meant it, which was strange, because at that age I would never admit publicly that I prayed. I had even made fun of my best mate, Doug, who had mysteriously become a Christian having attended a Billy Graham meeting. How we lads laughed because Doug had 'found God and seen the light!'

But when at last I *did* win my running colours, I felt that God must have heard my cry after all. But I didn't realise that He had much more to show me.

By another 'coincidence', our headmaster was a believer in Jesus Christ, and one day, during an assembly, he told us about a famous evangelist in India, a man called Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929).

This Sadhu (which means 'teacher') had walked the length of India, in bare feet and dressed in a saffron robe, telling people about Christ. Once, during a visit to Tibet, he was captured by Buddhist monks and flung into a deep pit and left to die. He lay there for three days, until a mysterious person threw him a rope and hoisted him out. This must have been an angelic rescue, because the pit was covered by a locked iron grill – so his Buddhist captors were stunned to see Sundar walking free.

This miracle caught my imagination. And God used it to put a longing in my own heart to know more about Jesus. The Holy Spirit also gave me

an impression that, one day, I too would go to India – and see God's power at work – which, eventually, was just what happened!

Within a few months, I was invited to hear the US evangelist Billy Graham, speaking via a relay from a vast meeting in Kelvin Hall, Glasgow. When Billy gave the invitation to accept Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, I went forward, surprising even myself. But it was a vital first step in my new life. I knew that from now on, everything would be different.

My **second** significant prayer occurred in my early twenties. The Bible speaks of the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I longed for more spiritual power, more boldness and confidence.

It is estimated that on average 3,000 people become Christians every 25 minutes.

I was then a young journalist on an evening paper in Preston, Lancashire. I was also a youth leader in a local church, yet I longed to know more of the power of God. However, a well-meaning church leader gave me some very poor advice about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly the God-given prayer language which the Bible calls the gift of tongues.

My leader explained that: “Spiritual gift is only for weak Christians who probably won’t survive any other way! We need only rely on the Bible.”

Well, he was wrong to limit the work of the Holy Spirit in that way. The Bible clearly teaches that this gift is our birthright for believers. Fortunately, I was eventually prayed for by others and, in faith, received a new prayer language. I also had a new joy and boldness to tell others about Jesus – and my stammer vanished.

It was an important step forward in a lifetime of adventure as a follower of Jesus Christ, but I should add that my dear parents were shocked at my commitment. They felt that I was about to throw away my life and all the benefits of a good education.

Later, when I was engaged to be married, they declared: “Don’t think we’re coming to your wedding.” And they didn’t. I was learning that there is a cost to following Christ, especially when family and close friends misunderstand us. Years later, however, both my parents came to faith in Christ.

To the Nations

Although I loved working on an evening newspaper, chasing round after front page stories, I had a greater longing – and that was to share my faith with others at home or abroad. It may sound whacky, but I remember praying a **third** significant prayer – that God would somehow use me to help reach *millions* of people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Was this a crazy immature prayer? A foolish delusion, maybe? Yet it was my heart cry as I walked home late at night from my girlfriend’s home, after missing the last bus home. I had no way of knowing then how God would answer me. But within a year I was off to Europe, and eventually India, working with hundreds of other young people in a movement called Operation Mobilisation, founded by George Verwer.

We drove overland to India by truck in three weeks and eventually launched a publishing programme that, in time, saw more than 100 million pieces of literature roll off the presses, in 12 major languages.



Today, there are more than 1,000 national workers carrying on that outreach work.

I was later asked by my friend George to search for an ocean-going ship which could carry hundreds of tons of educational and Christian books around the world. So I set off for Scandinavia and soon found the vessel which we purchased by faith and later re-named *Logos*, a Greek term meaning 'the Word' – since Jesus in the Bible is called the Living Word (or Expression) of God. On the maiden voyage, I flew ahead of the ship, lining up programmes at major ports in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

The *Logos* sailed for 14 years – and has now been replaced by other larger ships, notably the *Logos Hope* (over 12,000 tons), purchased in 2004. Today, more than 33 million people have visited these vessels which are manned by international crews. The ships feature huge book fairs, conference facilities and also act as floating Bible schools. They carry humanitarian aid and have visited more than 140 nations so far.

Did God answer those immature prayers that I uttered while walking home late in Preston? *Yes, he did.* Because I am convinced that God is willing to use any willing person – no matter how 'ordinary' – to help spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

After our time in India, Africa and Nepal as well as the ship ministry, I

returned to the UK because of key family commitments. Once again I resumed my journalistic work in the regional and national press. I became a deputy group editor of regional papers – and eventually, became a founding editor of a highly successful review published by the *Financial Times* in London.

Also in recent years, while working with local churches, my wife Lois and I have sought to help many troubled young people and ex-offenders find greater freedom from addictions and other serious issues.

Seeing people come to Christ is the greatest miracle of all. Today, there are 800 million Spirit-filled Christians on earth – more than any time in history. It is estimated that on average 3,000 people become Christians every 25 minutes, as new media technologies help to spread the word worldwide.

We are also seeing a longing among Christians to see more of God's healing power released. Churches and groups such as the FGBMFI are stepping out in faith in this area. For as Jesus declared: "According to your faith will it be done for you!" (Matthew 9:29).

We have also found that more and more churches are learning to pray for the sick – and it has been our joy to see God at work in this area. For as Jesus said, "According to your faith will it be done to you," (Matthew 9:29).

Michael Wiltshire is a former Editor with the Financial Times and the Regional Director of Full Gospel Business Men in East Anglia.



The Gift of Desperation

Dr Peter Whitlam, Sheringham, Norfolk

I left school at 15, without any qualifications and was unable to settle in a job.

I believe now that I probably had severe mental depression, but at that time this was neither recognised nor discussed. I started drinking heavily and my life quickly disintegrated. I wandered the country, became estranged from my family, got into trouble with the law, attempted suicide and was sectioned in psychiatric hospitals.

Helpless and hopeless I fell to my knees and cried out and pleaded that if there was a God, would he please help me get well. I remember being on my knees for some time and slowly getting an overwhelming sense of peace. I now know I had received the gift of desperation. I further promised God that if he would help me I would do anything he wanted me to do.

Today I believe that God puts people in our lives when we need them. It

was about this time I met my wife Madeleine. She was a woman who had not had an easy life; however she had been a Christian since childhood. She and I realised that something had happened to me, so we sought spiritual counsel. Eventually we both became Roman Catholics. I had stopped drinking but my faith was weak. For me worship was ritualistic and cold. I certainly had no personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I had also quickly forgotten my promise to God.

Despite this, over the next 15 years many good things happened to me. Education was the key. I completed a doctorate in psychology and held senior management positions in several major corporations. In 1988 I established my own international consulting practice and was earning big money. In addition my research work was published and I was sometimes invited to speak on TV and radio.

To the outside world my life was successful. I had a good career with all the material trappings, but we all know that looks can be deceptive. Deep within me I was riddled with doubt, insecurity and guilt. Pride and selfishness were hallmarks of how I lived. I could see I was sinful but I suppose I didn't really care. I rationalised that I was OK, but I knew deep down I wasn't. By now I had turned fifty and had retired. However

my health and things at home were once again starting to fall apart.

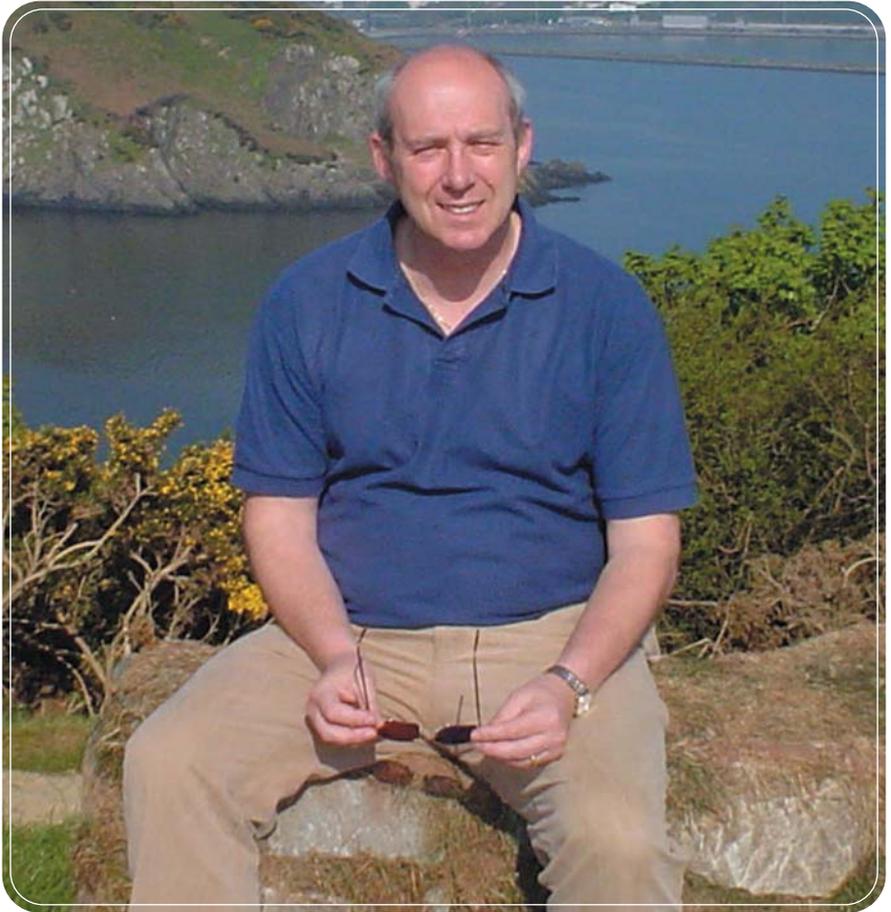
By 2003 my long suffering wife, who I knew had been praying for me for a long time, suggested that I might find the local Alpha course helpful. Alpha is a world-wide introductory video course to Christianity. I felt a bit insulted about this. After all I sometimes went to Mass with her, and I was generous in the way I supported both the church and charities. That meant I was a Christian didn't it? What could Alpha do for me?

My conversion was very dramatic. On the Alpha course I knew immediately that something special was happening to me. It all just clicked. It

wasn't that I heard anything that I hadn't heard before, it was just that somehow I now **absolutely knew it was true.**

Later that evening, alone at home, I got down on my knees. I thanked Jesus for dying for me and asked him to forgive me of my sins. I also asked him to give me the gift of his Holy Spirit. I think I became a Christian at that point. I remember thinking that now my life could never be the same again. I shed many tears in those early days, not because I was sad, but because I now really knew how much God loved me. I felt overwhelmed by it. I still do. Very quickly an immense feeling of peace came into my life. Shortly afterwards, a bit like my

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namesake the disciple Peter, I remembered that almost 20 years before I had made a promise to God. A promise which I had denied but one which I now knew I must honour.

Having been reminded of my promise to God I prayed to understand His will for me. He showed me what he wanted me to do. An opportunity to work with alcohol and drug misusers arose and I

returned to work. It felt as if all my life had been about preparing me for this work.

Since then my life has just got better and better. That doesn't mean to say it has got easier! Of course I still make mistakes, I still get things wrong, but today I have a way of dealing with things with God's help that I never had before. Today I know who I really am, and more importantly, where I am going.

Dr Peter Whitlam is a Psychologist working in Norwich.

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empower men for life is the purpose and focus of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International. What began following a vision given to Demos Shakarian, a business man, has spread to 160 nations in every continent in the world. The life changing story is told in the book *The Happiest People on Earth*.

Through our meetings we aim to:

- Reach men in all nations for Jesus Christ
- Reveal the power of Christ to men
- Offer Christian fellowship and mentoring for men
- Bring greater unity to the Christian Church worldwide
- Equip men to fulfil the Great Commission

If you have been challenged by the stories in VOICE you may be asking, "How can I become a Christian?"

A Christian is a person who has a personal relationship with God by inviting Jesus to become their Lord and Saviour.

God loves and accepts you just as you are. He is able to turn any mess into something marvellous! To become a Christian and to receive the gift of Eternal Life there are three steps to take.

Step 1 **Admit** that you have sinned and need a saviour to deal with your past and to assure your future.

Step 2 **Believe** that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the Cross to pay the penalty for your sins.

Step 3 **Receive** Jesus as Saviour and Lord of your life by personal invitation and ask His forgiveness for your sins.

Why not pray this simple prayer now to invite Jesus into your life:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I have sinned and am separated from you. But I believe you showed your love for me by sending your Son Jesus to die on the Cross for my sins. So I turn to you, Lord Jesus, with great thankfulness. I surrender my life to you. I ask You to forgive me for all my sins, to cleanse me from all unrighteousness and to send the Holy Spirit to live in me as my friend, my teacher and my comforter. I reject Satan and every evil spirit in the name of Jesus and I DECLARE the Word of God, "If the Son has set you free you are free indeed". I DECLARE that Jesus has set me free from all my sins, from every bondage of Satan. I have been born again, I am a child of God, I am a new creation, I have eternal life, in Jesus' mighty name. AMEN! HALLELUJAH!

Please let us know of your decision so that we can send you helpful information to "empower you for life".

- Please send me details of "empower men for life" meetings in my area.
- Please send me "Now that you've received Christ" booklet.

First Name: Surname:

Address:

.....

..... Postcode:

Tel: E-mail:

Data information will only be used to send you details of Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International and "empower men for life". (Full address details overleaf.)



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A Fantastic Deal

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