

Prayer: Heavenly Father, through weak human words, give us grace to hear your true and living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Why I am a Christian (3)



This is the third in the series – Why I am a Christian. We all have different stories – but there's one thing none of us can escape from – and that is the love of God. It starts with God, ends with God and is all about God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

From our first reading – the apostle Paul expressed it like this - we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.... God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. I'm a Christian because of the love of God – demonstrated by Jesus – and experienced through the Holy Spirit!

Possibly my favourite parable – which I came to appreciate even more the first time I was



chaplaincy visiting in hospital - is that of the prodigal son – which should really be called – the amazing love of God the Father.

A lady shared with me that she had believed in God and been active in the church but her life got so busy once she had family resulting in her she gradually forgetting God.

Now that she was critically ill she felt she couldn't return to God as she had ignored him for so long. I shared this parable – and how God is waiting, looking, longing and runs in love to welcome to all those who turn back to him. Her faith was restored! God has done everything he could, even at the cost of his own son dying for us – so that we can enter into relationship with him. That's why I'm a Christian!

But there're more reasons why!

I'm a Christian because of the prayers and encouragement of my family. Never underestimate the value of praying for someone or teaching a child the things of God! I am blessed with a rich



Shuter family Dartford Salvation Army
1916



Ada Blackmore –
missionary in China
1906-19933



Christian heritage although it did mean that some Sundays I had to attend church 6 times! On my mum's side my great grandfather was one of the early members of the Salvation Army, setting up the Dartford corps and even being put in prison one night for preaching the gospel on the street! On my Dad's side, from his father's 12 siblings brought up in a Devonshire village 3 became missionaries – in China, Argentina and Africa – and that was the

beginning of the last century! A lot of prayer went up for the subsequent generations! I knew my grandparents prayed daily for me along with my parents.

As soon as I was old enough to read my parents encouraged me to read the Bible every morning and I remember writing copious notes on what I was discovering! (I actually threw out many notebooks when moved I moved a couple of years ago and was amazed what I had written as a

child.) Every day as a family we had a Bible reading and prayed together but we didn't have a television!!



Despite having that heritage it didn't make me a Christian; I couldn't survive on a family faith – I had to make it my own. At the age of 8 I was a little worrier; I think I took after my mum! But one April Sunday evening the sermon was all on worry and I remember coming home and kneeling by my bed and asking for forgiveness and for Jesus to come into my life. My parents said I'd prayed that many times before – maybe I had - but this little worrier needed to be able to

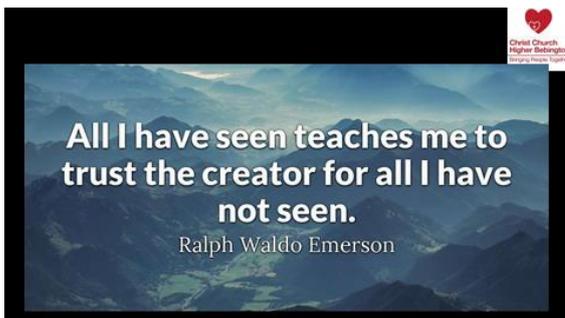
recall a specific time when she committed my life to following Jesus and made the faith her own. I recall being very excited about it!

But being a Christian isn't about having a date when you said a certain prayer. It's all about a daily commitment to walk with God, to follow after Jesus and to share his love, being willing to die every day to yourself, your selfish desires and become more like Jesus.

So how does a commitment some 50 plus years ago continue to make a difference in my life? And why am I still a Christian when others I know have since rejected it?

Once again, it's down to the love and faithfulness of God and the prayers of others – but there have been challenges to my faith.

I never intended to study science! I was frustrated when the school wouldn't let me take needlework O-level and the only other option was joint physics with chemistry! Little did I know I'd end up with a degree in chemistry and working for 33 years in industry! Someone once asked me if being in an industry that was motivated by profit was the right place for a Christian! I believe that wherever work we are called to be salt and light; people in every walk of life need to see how following Jesus makes a real difference.



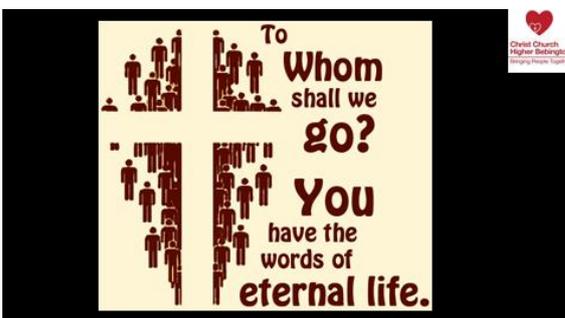
But is there a conflict between science and a belief in God? The more I was exposed to the intricacies of science the more I came to appreciate that behind it all there has to be an incredible mastermind. It couldn't have just come together by accident. As Ralph Emerson said – All that I have seen teaches me to trust the creator for all I have not seen. Science may offer some answers to the

how but not to the why. Why am I alive? Is there any purpose to life?

While there's a lot that doesn't yet fit nicely together, the older I have got, the more I have learnt to be comfortable with paradoxes. Rarely does everything fit nicely into one box – we have to live with much in tension – but I hold onto what is fundamental to me. If you take away God – you take

away hope. If you take away Jesus – I know my experience of love and life is incomplete.

When doubts come and I feel challenged to give up I come back to Peter's words in our gospel reading. Many were deserting Jesus because they were finding his teaching too challenging. So Jesus asked if they too wanted to give up. Simon Peter replied, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You

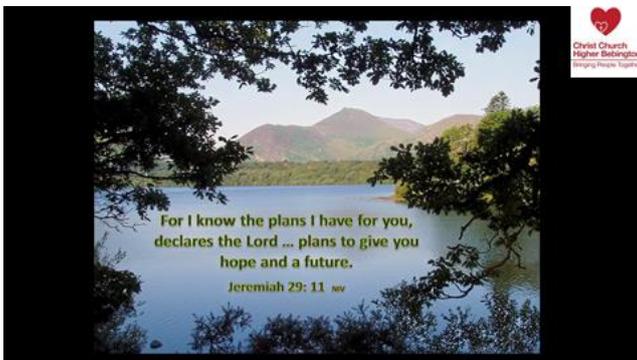


have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.’ No one else offers me that peace and hope. Nothing else deep down really seems to fit together to make sense of life.

But I’m also a Christian because I have been so very much aware of God’s presence particularly in the tough times. God never wastes any experience in our lives. In everything we can discover something more of God and his love and allow him to develop our character in ways he couldn’t do otherwise.

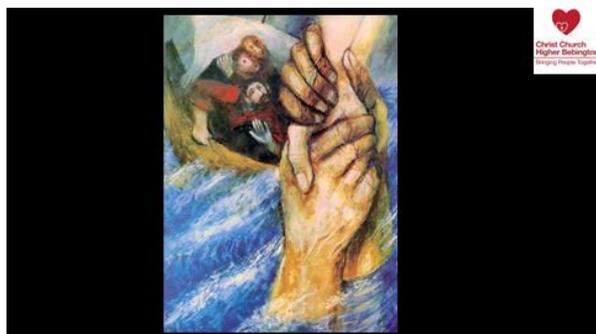
We read Paul’s words; “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us - they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady.”

The problem is God’s timing and way doesn’t always match ours! Perhaps that’s best illustrated when I was approaching 40 – a time often described as when life really begins. My career was going well. I was fitter than ever – but mid-year everything changed. Suddenly and unexpectedly I lost the ability to walk and was faced major spinal surgery without which I was told I would be paralysed within the year and even the surgery wasn’t expected to return me to “normal”! It took years of recovery – often battling with whether I should be classified as disabled. Suffering, illness changes you and leaves you with a different perspective on life. I knew the theory of allowing God to bring good out of every situation but now I had to discover the reality.



I certainly learnt to trust God more – and looking back I can see how God was preparing me for this ministry; initially through getting involved with hospital chaplaincy and being alongside others who were also struggling and even perhaps more surprisingly, becoming an Anglican!

I was excited when I retired from industry and started training for the ministry. I felt my life had come together and I was now pursuing all that God been preparing me for through the years. I didn’t expect that within weeks I’d have to put my life on hold for a year while I went through chemo and radiotherapy due to cancer. But once again I experienced God holding me, shaping me and hopefully making me more like Jesus.



So why am I still a Christian and would thoroughly recommend it to everyone else? It’s because God has never let me go. He’s held me through life’s experiences – and there’s more to come! Through the resurrection of Jesus I believe there is a hope that goes way beyond this life as well as providing me with as providing me with a reason for getting up every day.

And so we pray - Thank you Father for your great love for us. Thank you that you hold us throughout life and you have a plan and a purpose for each one of us. Help us to commit to following after you – daily. Amen

Rev. E Blackmore