

## **The Testimony of Mark Anderton in relation to the ministry of "The Gideon's international"**

It is my joy and privilege to take this opportunity in sharing my testimony to thank God for the ministry of the Gideon's international and their part in how I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ and by the grace of God am serving Him in my own ministry today.

My first contact with the Gideon ministry was as a boy aged 11 years old at my secondary school in England. The whole school was called into an assembly and as I remember now some twenty years later, on stage were a group of young men and women talking about the bible. At the end of the talk the whole school was given a copy of the New Testament from Gideon's international with a red plastic cover in the King James Version.

I was not converted immediately and continued in life without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ but as I look back with gratitude, kept my new bible in my "blue safety box" with my other most precious items from my childhood.

I grew up in England finishing school and working in a bank, enjoying music with a very active social life yet unable to answer the longing in my heart for fulfillment and suffering from depression and low self-esteem. This in turn led me into a life of alcohol dependence and by the time I was nineteen was also involved in taking drugs whenever the opportunity arose.

During this period I received a leaflet through my door proclaiming on a black background and white letters the word "Life". Thinking that this was the name of a local rock band I took my friend along to Chatham theatre where on entering came face to face with people lifting hands and singing the kind of songs only heard in church or at Easter or on TV. Feeling very awkward but at the same time interested and compelled I led my friend as far away from the main stage as possible high up in the balcony.

That evening the Rev Billy Graham preached a message of salvation and when he gave the invitation to receive Jesus as my savior I found myself retracing my steps down stairs from the balcony to the main stage at the front of the auditorium.

After praying the sinner's prayer, receiving some more leaflets explaining from the scriptures about God's plan of salvation, I said good bye to my friend (who had not gone forward) and I returned to my flat full of what I can only explain as unspeakable joy and overwhelming peace.

This *feeling* lasted for a period of several days and affected my appetite and I remember ringing all my family and friends on the telephone telling them of my experience. Sadly however I did not continue with my newfound faith and by the time some local believers came around to follow up on my decision card I had been convinced by my work mates that I would lose all my social life and end up as a weird religious freak of some kind if I were to continue.

I turned down the invitation to attend church or bible studies and continued in my life of alcohol and drugs this time resulting in even deeper depression and loneliness.

Within several months of this event I then lost the flat where I was living and had changed jobs to a town near by where I subsequently moved. The area was unpleasant and my neighbour upstairs was a violent man who could not stand the sound of my music coming from below. This combined with the fact that I had just broken off a marriage engagement left me feeling very isolated and depressed.

Living in what was really fear and torment with what seemed no future to my life I turned to a previous work colleague for help who I knew to be a member of the Salvation Army and a Christian. He encouraged me to begin reading the bible and for the first time in what must have been ten years I took my red plastic covered Gideon bible out of safekeeping and began to look through the pages. My friend who also had a Gideon bible encouraged me to read from the section at the front where it listed selected verses for different needs and I looked up the selection for direction.

I opened the bible to the book of proverbs and read this verse:

Prov 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. KJV

The words seemed to leap off the page and I began to keep a diary and wrote these verses on a large sheet of paper and placed them in my kitchen where I could see them everyday.

The desire came into my heart and I began to plan it out that I would travel abroad to Asia looking to go first to Malaysia and expecting to stay for about a year. It was so strong in my heart that family or friends could not dissuade me as I handed in my resignation to my employer and sold my car to raise money for the airfare. I was still addicted to alcohol and very lonely but my New Testament was now a source of strength and things for my journey began to take shape as I moved towards my vision believing that God had something for my life.

As I reflect back now to some 11 years ago, I can see how the Lord was working in fulfilling His word and bringing His plan to pass in my life. (Isaiah 55 verse 11)

When doors seemed to shut in my going to Malaysia despite my best efforts I eventually entered the Philippines islands in April 1991 staying with a contact I had made through playing in music bands in England. I remember praying to God in the airport and several times in my first few days in Manila that I was now standing on His word, trusting in Him and believing that He would direct my paths. My Gideon bible and now a second copy with New *and* Old testaments were in priority position in my rucksack.

For some reason I was still planning to make my way over to Malaysia to get some kind of income hoping to work in tea plantations and was visiting the local ports looking to work my way there on a boat. During my stay in Manila it was not long before the same problems I had faced with alcohol and drugs in the U.K began to surface again there.

I found my self-wasting away the little money I had in nightclubs and beer houses mixing with the wrong crowds and my ideals and commitments I had made to avoid such things were devastated and I felt I had failed God and myself. It was also about this time that people I had never met began to share with me in the street and local neighborhood about following Jesus and attending bible studies and coming to church. I was still afraid to do this thinking of what it would mean to really commit to God even though I suppose to trusting Him for my future. I guess I was ignorant and blinded to the wonderful things He had planned for me and had allowed fear to stop me from reaching out. God however is merciful and faithful to His word. Praise His name forever!

After leaving Manila and traveling to the province of Bacolod (*encouraged to do so by the owner of the house where I was staying*) more and more people were witnessing to me about Christ and living for him. It seemed wherever I went someone would share with me and invite me to go along with them to a Christian meeting.

Eventually in August 1991 five months after arriving in the Philippines and at two points being in danger of actually losing my life I came to be in a church in Bacolod city. I had met a Christian who came to the pension house where I was staying and had invited me to attend a "most excellent way bible study" for drug addicts and alcoholics. I guess he looked at my skinny body and torn jeans and just felt compassion for me. He picked me up and after the meeting I went home and ordered a beer at the store. As I was sharing with the girl who served me of the love and kindness I had experienced in the meeting and of Jesus being real she commented why then was I still drinking.

The next day I went to the Church service and when the Pastor gave an altar call I went up to the front of the pulpit and surrendered my life to Jesus. All and everything!

From that day until this I have been delivered from the desire for alcohol and drug abuse and have not looked back by the grace of God. Several days later at this church I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and began to experience the power Jesus spoke about to witness for Him. (Acts 1 vs 8) I attended just about every bible study in the church and began to grow and discover the wonderful inheritance that belonged to me under the cover of that little red New Testament.

There were certainly struggles along the way but as I came to know the bible I begun to understand what Jesus said in John 8:31-32

*"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." KJV*

In the same year in Bacolod I enrolled in bible school and after completion of two years of study I was ordained and began to serve the Lord as a teacher as well as training in the various ministry outreaches involved at the school. During this time I met Belen my beautiful Filipino wife and we were married in 1992.

In 1995 after a visit to England and the birth of our first child Elizabeth we returned to the Philippines under the covering of Manna Christian Fellowship to pioneer a church in the town of Burauen on the island of Leyte.

The Lord has blessed the work here and within five years we have seen a congregation come together and as a church we have outreaches into the local villages with feeding and community projects, a prison outreach every Sunday and have recently started God's love radio broadcast with a potential audience over fifty thousand listeners twice a week.

With a Daily Vacation bible School and the other ministries mentioned we continue to be blessed and supported by the work of *Gideon's international* here in the Philippines by receiving and distributing bibles among the community God has called to work.

I still have the little red New Testament given to me those twenty something years ago and more importantly I still cling to the promises that are within them that have been made available through what Jesus accomplished at the cross.

I have been even encouraged while writing this testimony and the recent sharing of Mr. James Tioco of *Gideon's International* in the Philippines never to underestimate the potential of the sowing of the Word of God. He in His own time and plan will take that which was sown and bring forth a harvest many times over for His glory and the extension of His kingdom.

Once again many thanks to God and the *Gideon International ministry* for their part in bringing the Word of Life within reach of people everyday.

Mark Anderton

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