



Be inspired and uplifted as you read twelve stories of people whose paths have crossed with 'Christians Against Poverty' (CAP). You will be amazed as you see God's transforming power at work in their lives.

This book illustrates how God is working with people from all walks of life today. From Mark and Lyndsay, a couple torn apart by attempted suicide who are now united as a family, to Andy, a corporate solicitor who gave it all up to defend the rights of those without a voice - our God can step into anyone's life and transform it beyond recognition.

'CAP's work amongst the poor and marginalised in the UK is inspirational and really needed at this time. We believe in a God who changes lives and through this charity, many desperate people have encountered the love of God in a practical and life-transforming way. These testimonies represent just a few of the people who have been offered hope where before there was none. CAP truly is transforming communities one life at a time.'

– ANDY HAWTHORNE, CEO & Founder of The Message Trust

'Debt tears families apart and drives individuals to desperation. It is one of the most pressing problems facing our society today. I am so thankful for the work of CAP and the thousands of people whose lives have been transformed through that work. I am inspired when I read about people who have been given a way through their financial trauma, regained their dignity and, most importantly, received hope.'

– ROB PARSONS, Care for the Family



www.capuk.org

All proceeds from the sale of this book will go to Christians Against Poverty

£5.99



Registered Office: Jubilee Mill, North Street, Bradford, BD1 4EW. Registered Charity No: 1097217. Charity Registered in Scotland No: SC038776. Company Limited by Guarantee, Registered in England and Wales No: 4655175.

JOURNEYS OF HOPE

12 LIVES CHANGED BY GOD



JOURNEYS OF HOPE

12 LIVES CHANGED BY GOD

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY

C A P BOOKS



Lyndsay, Mark and their two children with John Kirkby.

1. NEW LIFE

Mark & Lyndsay's Story

Lyndsay's Story

I was shaking slightly as I held the pill bottle in my hand, wondering what to do. With two young children and only a couple of years into marriage, it should have been the happiest time of my life, but I was desperate. I felt alone, isolated, scared, depressed. Nothing I tried could shake off the feelings of insecurity I had. Who understood me? I couldn't talk to my husband, Mark; I found it impossible to open up and he probably wouldn't have understood me anyway. What was the answer to all this hurt, fear and pain?

I looked down at the pill bottle again, still clutching it tightly in my hand. Perhaps this was the only answer. It would be an end to all my problems once and for all. I wouldn't have to worry about money, about my lack of self-worth, about the difficulties with Mark. It would all be gone in an instant. I couldn't face being without the children, but what good was I to them when I was this depressed? There was no hope for us. I just couldn't face another day of fear and worry.

I unscrewed the cap of the bottle and tipped a couple of pills into my hand. I looked at them closely. Just a few small pills would take all this desperation away. A few small pills was all it would take. I tipped a few more onto the palm of my hand and counted them out; eight, nine, ten. Trembling in fear I took the first pill and placed it on my tongue. Then, taking a sip of water, I swallowed it down. That pill meant no more worries. The next pill went down more easily. No more financial difficulty. The third barely touched the sides as I swallowed. No more arguments with Mark. The fourth I hardly noticed. No more anxiety and insecurity. The fifth, the sixth, the seventh, then it all went black...

When I woke up in hospital I wasn't sure where I was. People were standing around, but I was still in a daze. I could

barely see. Mark was there too, but I hardly recognised him. Then the shame suddenly hit me as I remembered what I'd done. How could I tell him that I'd rather die than carry on with our marriage? And the kids; what would they think? How could I say the words 'Mummy didn't want to live anymore'? The shame was massive, almost unbearable. I cringed inside and out. The doctors told me that if it had been any longer before I'd got to hospital, there would have been nothing they could have done. I had come so close to dying, but something had meant I was spared.

Then all the thoughts came rushing back, like someone had opened the floodgate of my memory; all the money worries, all the insecurity, all the desperation, all the depression. All the things I'd tried so hard to escape and all those mountains I felt I could never get over. It just hit me like a wave. I knew I was still alive for a reason, but I had no idea what that reason was. All I knew was that these problems needed to be sorted out. The thing was, they had stemmed all the way from my teenage years.

When I was pregnant with our eldest daughter, the doctors said there was a problem with her heart; that it was beating too fast. It made the pregnancy feel like I was walking a tightrope and I constantly had these 'what ifs' running through the back of my mind. What if she never made it? What if she was born with severe heart problems? What if I wasn't able to cope as a new mother? It was crushing; the tension was almost unbearable.

Thankfully, she was born healthy, but I suffered terrible post-natal depression. I think part of it was due to the stress of the pregnancy. By the time our second daughter was born two years later, the depression was still there and following her birth, it got even worse. When Mark and I married I had hoped that some of the problems

would go away, but it just seemed to make them worse. We couldn't communicate and I felt so isolated. I switched off and shut down. I couldn't open up to him about the way I was feeling and I just wanted all the problems to go away.

Added to this were the money worries. The debt problems began when we rented a nice two-bedroom flat as a couple. We had been living with my mum in a large house, but there were so many of us it was impossible to get personal space. Mark and I wanted a nice family home with the kids. We were naïve and thought you just found the flat you wanted and said, 'We'll rent it.' News that we needed to put a deposit down on the flat came as a shock.

It wasn't a massive deposit, but £800 was beyond our reach at that time as we didn't have any savings. We'd never managed to get credit out but the bank was very keen to give us an overdraft to cover it. We jumped at the chance; we could be independent of my mum and also build a lovely family home for us and our two children. Little did we know that it would be the starting point for our financial crisis.

I had done plenty of catalogue shopping before and always managed to pay things off on time, but with the interest and payments on the overdraft, it really started to eat into our finances. Soon we weren't coping with the repayments and things started to spiral out of control. We weren't servicing our existing debt, let alone paying the rent and the overdraft. It was a desperate time and one of the main contributors to my attempted suicide. Although we had never argued about money, it was a real stress for me and a constant worry.

I don't think it's ever just one thing that drives someone to suicide, but a combination. For me, I couldn't take the endless assault of my insecurities, money worries and fear. It was too much for one person to take and I wanted out. Mark was distraught and I felt

awful that I'd let him down, but with all my insecurities I just wasn't able to tell him how I was feeling and being able to trust was a total no-go. It was impossible for me to trust anybody and that included Mark. I would question everything he said and wonder whether he was lying to me, which created a real atmosphere of tension in the house. He really struggled too because he was desperate to convince me that he was trustworthy and that he loved me, but I just couldn't take it in. There was this barrier that he couldn't ever get behind and it must have caused him so much pain.

A couple of months before I tried to end it all, I had a brief chat with my aunt, who was a CAP client. She talked to me about the work of the charity and how it could help people like me. I thought it was interesting at the time, but I really wasn't desperate enough to take her up on the offer. Then my world totally fell apart and I took an overdose. I think everything just caught up with me. It's amazing how a crisis can make you think more clearly than you've ever thought before.

Once I had recovered enough to leave hospital, it was only a matter of weeks before I contacted Gemma, the Centre Manager at the CAP Centre in Walton to arrange a visit. I was so nervous before our first meeting in January 2008. I can remember sitting on the sofa with Mark, surrounded by our financial files.

We had managed to stay quite well organised in spite of the financial worries and difficulties. I had a file with all my expenses in, Mark had his own file and then we had a joint file too. Still, I was worried that Gemma would come in and be shocked about how badly we had managed our finances.

With the shame of the suicide, I was also worried about the shame of failing financially. What would Gemma say? I secretly hoped that she wouldn't be judgemental, but I feared the worse. As a car pulled

up outside our house, my heart raced. I nervously went over to the window and peered out. I could see a woman, about the same age as me, sitting in the driver's seat and looking through various files and then closing her eyes. She looked like she was talking to someone. I thought it was a little strange, but I went back to sit on the sofa and wait to see whether she knocked at the door. I glanced at Mark. I could tell by the look on his face that he was equally nervous.

It seemed like ages but she finally approached our house and knocked at the door. I wondered what she'd been doing in the car and as I went to answer the door I felt sick with nerves. As I opened it, a young woman just stood there beaming at me. She smiled, held out her hand to shake mine and said 'Hi, I'm Gemma from CAP.' We welcomed her in without really knowing what to expect, but looking back, that meeting was one of the most amazing experiences I'd ever had. It was such a relief to chat to her about our finances and the difficulty we had got into. We handed everything over to her, including the three files and nervously waited to see what she made of them. To our surprise, she said how well organised we were and that previously she'd left homes with bin bags full of bank statements, bills and court orders!

That made me feel more reassured about things, but the greatest relief of all was to hear that Gemma would now be looking after our finances and helping us whilst we paid off the debt in manageable monthly payments. I now had hope that the finances could be sorted out. I could finally breathe again and I could tell that Mark was relieved too. The best news of all was when the financial plan came back from CAP's head office and it showed that we could spend £100 on food a week, because we had two children. That meant we wouldn't have to live on the cheapest, smallest amount of food just to get by;

we could enjoy eating healthily again without worrying about not paying back the debt. Over time the threatening letters stopped coming through the post too. That made such a difference to the quality of our lives.

With our finances now under control, it gave me space to consider the other problems that had been plaguing me. The insecurities were still there and I wondered whether I would ever shake them off. I still found it almost impossible to trust Mark and I knew that this needed to be sorted out, otherwise it would be the end of our marriage. The truth is, if the husband won't trust the wife or the wife refuses to trust the husband, a marriage is doomed and ours was looking worse than ever.

Out of the blue, a few months into working with CAP, Gemma invited us to a special night she was putting on for her clients and those from the other Liverpool CAP Centre. I was a little suspicious at first, but decided to go along and so did Mark. It seemed like a really kind gesture, although I was unsure about what was going to happen that evening. I felt very nervous but once I'd arrived found it reassuring to meet other clients who were being helped by CAP.

There was food to eat and the CAP Support Workers were so lovely. It really blew me away how nice everyone was. I was unprepared for what would happen next, though. I just thought it was going to be a relaxed evening and the chance to meet some more CAP clients. Part of the evening was spent watching a short film called 'Rain' from Rob Bell at NOOMA¹. I can remember in the film the fact that he was

¹NOOMA DVDs are short films that explain life issues from a Christian perspective, using language and images that are relevant to modern society. At CAP we often use these DVDs to communicate Christianity to our clients. www.nooma.com.

walking through the forest in the rain with his baby son on his back in a baby carrier. The rain was pelting down and his son was becoming more and more anxious and started to scream and cry.

So Rob Bell said to his child, 'Everything's going to be OK, buddy. Daddy's here and he loves you.' I was holding Mark's hand at the time. Then, all of a sudden, I felt this massive squeeze around my middle, but it wasn't like someone was giving me a hug from the outside, but a hug from the inside. It wasn't painful but the pressure was intense. I squeezed Mark's hand as I thought I was going to pass out. It was a strange experience but after a few seconds it went and I was left a bit stunned by the whole thing.

I plucked up the courage to speak to Gemma about it, as it was such a bizarre experience. She asked me really directly, 'You know who it was, don't you? It was God giving you a hug.' 'Yes, I guess so,' I replied and inside I knew it was true. Then, quick as a flash she asked, 'Well, what's stopping you from becoming a Christian then?' and I said the words 'well nothing, really.' As they tumbled out of my mouth, I was surprised by how easily I said them and how much I believed it to be true.

In what seemed like a matter of seconds, about five people had gathered round to pray with me. We sat down and I asked God into my life, said sorry for the wrong things I'd done and asked his forgiveness. I felt absolutely amazing after that, like I was floating on air for the rest of the evening. It was like I was lifted up and walking taller than everyone else. People kept saying to me, 'You're glowing, you're glowing.' I felt incredible and went to bed that night so happy and peaceful.

The following morning when I woke up, I still felt overwhelming joy and peace. It was like someone had reached into my brain and removed all the insecurities I felt and all the worry. When you have

these insecurities, it doesn't matter how happy you are in the moment, they're always there, at the back of your mind. The amazing thing was, they'd gone. Totally gone! I still struggle with them from time to time but now I know that I have the support and love of God to help me deal with them. He has turned my life around and I can't put into words how much of a help the love and support of CAP has been too.

Mark's Story

When Lyndsay became a Christian, I couldn't get over the change in her. She was on a high for a few months afterwards and it totally changed our relationship. Before, it had been impossible for me to convince her that I loved her and that she could trust me but now we're able to communicate and we're building a stronger relationship as each week goes by. It obviously hasn't always been that easy, though.

Seeing her in hospital after the overdose was one of the most horrific experiences of my life. I can remember the pain and trauma like it was yesterday. It was like she was behind a bullet-proof screen. I could see her and communicate with her but I couldn't reach her. It was desperate. Nothing I said or did would break the barrier down. She always questioned what I said, thought I was lying and would find it impossible to trust me.

I was so close to giving up hope and with the money problems it got even worse. We were slipping further and further into debt and when Lyndsay took an overdose I knew that things had reached crisis point. With two young children and a beautiful wife, I tried so hard to hold it all together but I wasn't able to. When we approached CAP for help, it really was our last chance, as previous companies who had promised the same service hadn't delivered. CAP really was all we had left to try.

Meeting Gemma for the first time was such a nerve-wracking experience. I can picture that day now, with me and Lyndsay sitting nervously on the sofa waiting for the knock at the door, surrounded by our files and a mountain of questions.

When Gemma did finally come to the door and introduce herself, we were shocked by how friendly, calm and unjudgemental she was. We had expected someone to come into our house and really tell us off for the way that we had been handling our finances, but from Gemma we got reassurance, love and a good deal of patience too. When we said goodbye to her after that meeting I was so relieved. I finally felt like there was someone who understood our financial situation and who could help us. I was desperate and although I didn't admit it to Lyndsay at the time I was sure there was no way out for us. Gemma's visit gave me hope again.

Gemma was amazing and when she came back with the financial statement, I was bowled over that we could pay off our debt in a good period of time, still eat properly and save money too. It was fantastic to worry less about the money side of things and when the threatening letters slowed down and stopped I knew the financial plan was working. I was relieved about our finances, but I knew things between Lyndsay and me were still tough and all the insecurities she had were still there.

When Gemma invited us to the client evening, I have to confess I was pretty dubious. I know Lyndsay was really nervous, but I was more suspicious about the whole thing and wasn't sure whether we would enjoy ourselves or not. When we arrived it was actually reassuring to see the other clients and nice to have some food together and have our photo taken. I felt a bit more relaxed and sat down with Lyndsay

to watch the 'Rain' DVD by NOOMA. We were holding hands at the time, a sign that things had started to improve between us.

Half way through the DVD Lyndsay suddenly started to squeeze my hand really tight. I wasn't sure why at the time and thought it was a bit strange but then she shared about how she felt squeezed in her middle when Rob Bell was talking about comforting his baby son. She spoke to Gemma a few minutes after and all of a sudden people gathered round and Lyndsay became a Christian. I'd like to say I was shocked by it all, but secretly I wasn't. It felt right at the time and whilst I'd never formally made a commitment to be a Christian, I did pray from time to time.

Seeing the change in Lyndsay afterwards was pretty amazing, though. She looked so different; her eyes changed and her face was literally glowing; people kept coming up to her and saying that as the evening drew to a close. The following morning when she woke up she shared about how the insecurities that had plagued her for so long were gone. I was amazed and relieved. It was like someone had lifted a weight from my shoulders. I knew at that point that there was hope for our relationship, that we were able to move forward as a couple. It was mind-blowing to see the change in her and she was on a high for several months after. After years of trying to convince her that I loved her, she was able to accept it. She had changed from the inside out. I was still not sure about being a Christian, though.

We'd never been on a holiday as just the four of us, so when Gemma invited us to go on a Discovery Break to Hayes, Swanwick, we jumped at the chance. It was a free holiday and a much-needed break from all the stress and trauma of the past six months. Lyndsay and I were really looking forward to it, but as the day got closer, we became a little more nervous. We were going to be staying with other CAP clients

and some of the staff too and I wasn't sure what to make of the idea. Whilst I'd seen an amazing change in Lyndsay, I was pretty convinced I didn't want to commit to being a Christian and was concerned about them trying to make me.

We didn't know anyone when we arrived, but Lyndsay spotted Matt Barlow out of the corner of her eye. She said to me in a joking way 'he's weird, that one,' but apart from the dodgy Scouse accent he tried to do, we got to know him and his wife, Josie, really well over the course of the four days. They were so kind to us and we've since struck up a great friendship with them. We also made friends with a Scottish family too and that helped us to settle in to the break a bit more easily as we'd eat with them at mealtimes.

Ever since I was a child, I'd always had a faith that God existed and I used to pray to him from time to time, but I never had the faith to believe in Christianity. Seeing the change in Lyndsay convinced me that it was the right faith, but I just wanted to become a Christian at the right time. On the second night we watched the video 'Rain' by Rob Bell and I think Lyndsay was secretly hoping I'd get a 'God Hug' whilst watching it too. Nothing happened and I think she was a little disappointed, but we broke into small groups towards the end of the night to discuss what we'd seen. Josie was leading the discussion in our group, but no-one else was talking and I couldn't stand sitting there in silence, so I started to speak. 'I'm not a Christian yet,' I started. 'I do believe, but it's just not the right time to make a commitment.'

Josie came back quick as a flash and said, 'It sounds like you're the kind of person that needs to think things through thoroughly before making a decision, like you need to rationalise everything.' That challenged me, but I still wasn't prepared to make a commitment to follow Jesus. I didn't want to disappoint Lyndsay, but I knew it had

to be the right time and I wasn't going to bow to pressure. Later on that night, we were sitting in a group with some other people having a drink and Matt came over to join us. When we started talking about Christianity and whether we had faith in Jesus, I said, 'I'm not a Christian yet, but it is a four-day break!' Matt asked me why I hadn't yet become a Christian and I suddenly felt convicted that I needed to pray the prayer of salvation.

Becoming a Christian was the most life-transforming decision I have ever made. Not only has it brought me closer to Lyndsay, but I now have this incredible relationship with God where I know I can rely on him for my strength. Our two beautiful daughters also became Christians on that Discovery Break too and I'm amazed at how God has saved us as a family.

My new relationship with God is great and I'm learning how to pray as well. Sometimes when I pray out loud, the words don't seem to make sense, but in my head they do! It's amazing how God can restore where it feels like so much has been taken away from you. When Lyndsay took her overdose, I never believed that we would be able to pull through. There was just so much hurt, pain and difficulty to overcome. God gave us the strength and through CAP he made himself known to us and showed us how much he loves us. It's amazing to think that as a family we now have hope for the future and we're part of a new family with other Christians.

We recently stayed at Matt and Josie's house whilst they were away on holiday. It was such a fantastic break and nice to get away from Liverpool for a few days. Lyndsay said to Josie and Matt that she wanted to swap lives with them. Matt replied that we couldn't swap lives, but that we could come and be a part of theirs and that's the way I'd sum up being

a Christian, really; being part of the most incredible family you could ever imagine, with God as the parent you always wanted.