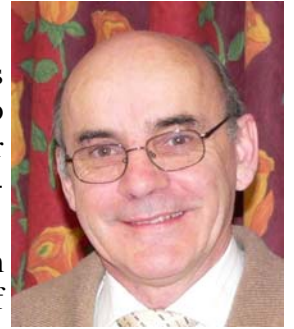


Toni's Testimony

My name is Tony, and I was an alcoholic. On the 9th of January 2003, an event that has transformed me on the inside took place in my heart. Although I had been addicted to alcohol since my teens, I was released from its grip. Alcohol no longer has any power over me. I don't even think about it. When I was freed from my addiction, I couldn't believe it. I kept looking to see when it would return. To this day, I'm still free.

The purpose of this testimony is to give you, the reader, assurance that if you suffer from an addiction — no matter what it may be — you, too, can be freed from the bondage of your addiction.



At this stage, I want to give credit to the One who freed me. His name is Jesus. Don't let any pre-conceived idea that you may have about Jesus prevent you from investigating for yourself what He has to offer you.

If you are in real trouble and are looking for a way out, check out the information following my testimony. I know of no other programme that offers you complete freedom from your addiction. If you want to know more, we are called "Reformers Unanimous" — a Christ-Centred Addictions Programme. We meet every Friday night at 7:00 p.m. at Ballyphehane Community Hall.

Tony's Testimony

I was born in Ennis, Co. Clare, where I was brought up as a Catholic. I have two older brothers, an older sister, and a younger brother and sister. I started to drink alcohol on a regular basis at age fifteen. I left home at eighteen and joined the Irish Naval Service. I was married at age twenty-five to my wife Dina. We have two children.

I was hospitalised for alcoholism at age thirty-two. Over the next seven years I struggled with alcohol, with my marriage, and with my career. In 1991 I left my job, because I could no longer do the work I was trained to do. I wandered around for the next five years, as I tried to work and tried not to drink. I was in and out of AA and psychologists' offices. I needed help, but I couldn't figure out what had gone wrong. I felt that I was different from everyone else.

I was hopeless, lonely, and lost. I was suicidal. I prayed that God would take me, because I was a complete failure in every area of my life. I was completely alone, even though I was surrounded by my family and friends.

I stopped drinking on the 19th of October, 1996. This date stands out in my mind, because one of my children had started to drink alcohol. I knew what lay ahead for someone so young, because I, too, had drunk as a teenager. Because I was unable to confront my child and say that it was wrong, I stopped drinking.

I went to AA, and to a treatment centre. I am very grateful to the treatment centre, and especially to the AA, for all the help I received. I took on the AA programme with my whole heart. I served at group level and at area level. Yet, after six years in AA, I could never pass the third step, which spoke of handing my will and my life over to the care of God, *as I understood Him*. I was looking for God. I was trying to

find my "understanding" of him. I thought at that time that "all roads lead to God" — that your spiritual path depends upon where you were born, and upon what religion you were brought up to follow. At this time, AA was my religion: but it didn't tell me Who God is.

Toward the end of 2002, the Baptist Church in Carrigaline handed out some calendars that contained some Scripture from the Bible. I read in it a poem by a fourteen-year-old girl. I knew from what she had written that this young Christian girl knew more about God than I did. My wife saw the calendar and asked me if I would read a book that was advertised by this church. So I did. With this book came a tape called "The Uniqueness of Christianity," by J.P. Richardson.

I had never heard anything like this before. It was the message that God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross in order to save sinners from Hell. After I had heard this message, I asked God what was going to happen to me after I die. Straightaway I felt condemned. It was a frightening experience. I thought the best thing to do was to forget it! The following day I asked myself the same question again, and God gave me the same answer. I was held in condemnation, and it seemed like forever. I determined that when I was released from this feeling, I would not ask this question anymore.

A few days later, I was in a friend's house to check on his dog while he was away on business. While I was there, I decided to play one of his tapes. As I looked to see what kind of music he liked, I picked up a tape that I did not want to see. It was the testimony of the conversion of a Roman Catholic priest called Richard P. Bennett, and it was entitled "From Tradition to Truth." I put it aside and carried on with my original plan; but I had no peace. Finally, I played this tape and listened to his testimony. After a while, I became really interested in his testimony. This priest left the priesthood when he realised that he had to be "born again" to enter the Kingdom of God, and that his religion or his own good works could not save him.

At this stage, I had heard the Gospel preached twice, but I was still not sure of what it was. As I listened to this priest's testimony, a loud noise came over the speakers. It got so loud that I could no longer hear him speaking. I took the tape out and saw that there was a name and telephone number on it. After a while I rang that number; but I thought that there wouldn't be anyone on the other end of the phone. Straightaway the phone was answered, and the man on the other end was the pastor of the Bible Baptist Church of Ballincollig. He invited me to visit his church the following day: and I did.

This was the first time I had seen anyone preaching from the Bible. I heard that I had to be "born again." I heard that my first birth was a physical birth, but that now I needed to be reborn spiritually. I learned that because of my sin, I was separated from God. I learned that there is a severe penalty for sin, and that this penalty is death. This means not only that I would die physically, but also that I would spend eternity in Hell. I knew that I was a sinner; but I had hoped that God would turn a blind eye to my past, since I had gotten sober and had turned over a new leaf. However, God cannot overlook sin. All sin must be paid for. Then I learned that God sent his Son to the cross to pay the penalty that I owed for my sin. I had never known why Jesus died on the cross, or what His death accomplished. He died so that I could go free. His death paid the debt that I owed to God.

Slowly but surely, the picture came together for me. At last, I understood that the Gospel message is that Christ died for my sins. Not being sure that this offer was for me, I looked at it for a while. Did God want me? I was told that God loves me, that He died for me, and that He wanted to save me. I kept holding back. Then one day, I just went to the cross and told Jesus that I was sorry for my sins, and I asked Him whether or not He would save me. Nothing happened that day, except that I cried a lot; but I wasn't sure that I was saved. On the 9th of January 2003, I prayed again with my Pastor. After I had prayed, I asked pastor, "Am I saved?" He said, "Yes." That's the moment when I believed.

Over the next few weeks, I noticed that I had stopped praying to be kept away from alcohol. I also noticed that I wasn't thinking about alcohol anymore. I continued to attend AA for about six months; but I noticed that all the others were talking about their "disease." I did not seem to be suffering the way they were suffering. Eventually, I stopped going to AA, because everyone was talking about the problem, but no one was interested in the solution.

Jesus Christ is the solution to all our problems, no matter what they may be. It is interesting to note that by the time I had come under conviction of the fact that I was a sinner condemned to Hell, and that I was without the saving grace of Jesus Christ, alcoholism had already taken a back seat position. It was no longer the main problem in my life.

Today I am a *recovered* alcoholic, not a "recovering" alcoholic. The Lord Jesus has saved me from the power that alcohol had over my life. Even more importantly, He has saved me from an eternity in Hell, and has given me the gift of eternal life. I know that when my time comes to leave this world, I will be with Him forever in heaven.

If you are an addict as I was, then you are just as stubborn as I was. You are probably trying everything in your power to control your addiction. Alcohol toys with you. It gives you a false sense of control. Then it turns on you, and destroys you and everyone that is near to you. You have the Way out. His name is Jesus. Why don't you find out who He is, and what He can do for you?

A Thanksgiving Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you for guiding me safely through all life's pitfalls, and through the scourge of alcoholism. I know now that you used this opportunity to get my attention. Thank you for your grace and your love in Christ Jesus. Thank you for freeing me from my addiction. Help me to tell others of your great love and salvation.

In Jesus' name, Amen.