

from PRODIGAL to PREACHER

The Testimony of Chris Killen



On July 25, 1966, a family in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, welcomed a baby boy. He was their third son, and they had high hopes that he would fulfil their dreams for him and succeed in life. But by the time he was fifteen he had so broken their hearts that they had to ask him to leave home. The other boys had done well in school and in business, but this one was sinking to the depths, a real prodigal. And yet today those parents rejoice in that wayward son. No longer a prodigal, he is a preacher of the gospel and a winner of souls. Chris Killen was the boy's name and this is his story.

As a boy, Chris Killen had a normal home life and enjoyed a good upbringing. A neighbour lady took a great interest in his soul and brought him to Sunday school every Lord's Day. In the years that followed it must have appeared to her that her efforts had been wasted, but they weren't, as our story will show.

Despite all the advantages of a good home and the chance to attend a good school, as well as exposure to the gospel, Chris fell into bad company. By the age of twelve he had started to drink alcohol and a year later was getting into drugs. By the time he was fifteen he had taken to mixing drink and various antidepressants and tranquillizers. Nothing his parents did or said made any difference. He was a rebel against all restraint. So he was happy when on the same day in 1981 he was expelled from school and asked to leave the family home. It was just what he wanted. This was freedom and he could hardly wait to enjoy it to the full.

Chris moved to Belfast where he lived with some friends. Those were days of reckless abandon. All they seemed to do was to drink, do drugs, and cause trouble. But those young fellows thought that they were really living. For a while Chris moved to London and for the next few years flitted between there and Ulster. In 1983 he met a young woman, Linda Castles, and two years

later he married her. They set up home in Lisburn and in 1986 they had a baby girl, Samantha.

Samantha became very ill and lay in hospital hovering between life and death. After visiting her, Chris went to his parents' home deeply distressed. Alone in his brother's bedroom he began to think of life and of his life in particular. He was engulfed with bitter self-reproach as he thought of all the sorrow he had caused. The thought persisted, *You have brought shame and sorrow to all around you. You broke your mother's heart. You have brought this illness on your baby. Your baby is going to die and it is your fault. The best thing you could do for everybody is to end your life.*

Chris tried to commit suicide, but God overruled. His parents found his unconscious body in the bedroom and rushed him

The Lord was about to answer the prayers that had gone up for this young prodigal.

August 26, 1989, was the great day when He did so. That day Chris learned that a very major surgery was necessary. He was staring death in the face. As he did so, what he had learned in Sunday school came back to his mind, at least enough to bring him under deep conviction of sin. Seeing just how wicked he was in the sight of God, he shook and wept. His surgeon came by and asked him what was wrong.

"Sir, I have lived for the devil. I have been a fool. I believe I am going into eternity and I am bound for hell," was the tearful reply.

In the providence of God that surgeon was a Christian and, taking a Bible from his pocket, he showed Chris Killen the way of

from the effects of drugs. In this battle the Lord kept and strengthened him. Indeed, He began to deal with him about training for full-time service. Ever since his conversion, Chris had had a burden to reach other young people who were trapped in drug addiction. He remembered that during his teen years he had never once been approached by a Christian with the message of the gospel. He determined that he would do his best to see that other young people would hear of Christ.

As the Lord's dealings with him became plain, Chris, who had joined Lisburn Free Presbyterian Church in 1990, applied to be accepted for training in the Whitefield College of the Bible. He commenced his three-year course in 1992 and since graduating has commenced a very effective ministry among young people. He teaches a

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to hospital where he remained unconscious for four or five days. He lived, but he was far from well. His body began to feel the effects of the life he had lived over the past number of years, and three months after his suicide attempt Chris had to return to hospital. In fact he almost lived in the hospital for the next three years. In that time he underwent surgery some fifty times. As a result, he became addicted to morphine, an addiction he found the most difficult to overcome.

Finally, in the summer of 1989 Chris was back in hospital for yet another surgery. His doctors felt they could correct his problem and have him home in a week or two. However, one operation led to another, and he spent a total of ten weeks in hospital at that time. Even then Chris was far from penitent. Indeed, he rather boasted of his sin to the other patients and his language left no doubt that he was as ungodly as ever. But all that was about to change.

salvation. As he lay there in the bed, too weak even to get out of it to kneel to pray, Chris called on God to have mercy on him and save him for Jesus' sake. And He did. Chris says, "That was the most glorious day of my life. O, the joy there was of sins forgiven!"

He went to surgery and survived. Back in the ward he was clearly a new man. Gone was the foul language and the boasting of sin. Now he set about telling everyone he met of what the Lord had done for him—patients, nurses, doctors. To one and all he testified, "This is what the Lord has done for me and He can do the same for you."

The change in his life was immediate and profound. So was the change in his home, for a few months later his wife, Linda, was saved. However, though he was a new creature, Chris found, as many other drug addicts have found, that it took about five years to get his mind and body free

Bible-based anti-drugs programme in a number of state schools. He has worked with young people on the streets of Belfast and has made contact with addicts in many parts of Ulster.

Chris sees a bright future for his ministry. He sees an urgent need to establish a truly Christian rehabilitation programme for drug addicts and is currently studying the feasibility of opening a facility where young addicts who have turned to Christ may receive the help and support they need to live for God, free from dependence on drugs.

Despite ongoing medical problems, Chris is a walking sermon on the power of God's grace. He is an inspiration to God's people and a living proof to addicts who have sunk into despair that there is hope for them, that the Christ who saved Chris Killen can save them too. ■

Chris Killen's full story will be published by Ambassador later this year.