

**Clare's Testimony** *Clare is a member of our Church who had a harrowing, but life-changing, experience. She will never be the same again, but in the best way possible.*

"In July 2013 my life changed forever!

At the end of May 2013 I had collapsed with excruciating pain in the stomach. I was very scared and was taken into hospital and remained there for ten days. Whilst I can't say that I enjoyed my time and experience in hospital I did experience a walk with God that was truly awesome.

I was told the operation was a success but five days later one of my organs still refused to 'wake up' and no progress was being made. I was given just 24 hours to show improvement otherwise further tests would be carried out and potentially more surgery. I feared major surgery that could have life changing effects.

I hit a real low but visits from church friends and family lifted my spirits. As I entered the night I was sent so many messages of pray. What happened next I can't explain but I feel I had a direct experience with God, He held my hand – I felt it, He poured down his love, removed any doubt and made me feel safe.

All of a sudden my body kicked itself into action, within eight hours all surgical tubes were removed, I'd walked, I'd eaten and I'd drunk the best cup of tea ever!

That morning the ward felt different and it was only when I had a visitor and they remarked that there were no bleeps from drips on the ward that I worked it out. Not only had I received great healing but it had overflowed and every one of my rooms mates had experienced a distinct improvement in their health and all drips and monitors were gone.

I came home and looked forward to my recovery, to returning to 'normal' life.

And so my recovery from emergency bowel surgery was going well. I seemed to be recovering well and was feeling stronger by the day. On 3rd July 2013 Nigel and I went to see the surgeon and had a very jovial meeting about how to get rid of scars, about how unusual I was and about how when they couldn't seem to find anything wrong with me to be causing the pain a last minute cancellation in surgery came up and he found himself saying he wanted Clare Bonson in. An hour later he opened me up and found I was on the point of rupture and that if that cancellation hadn't happened, if he hadn't suddenly shouted my name, things would have been very different. How blessed we felt.

He then turned to his computer and read a report. Our world turned upside down. I had lymphoma. I remember hearing myself say, "Are you telling me I have cancer?" "Yes" he said. At the same time I heard a voice quietly speaking to me, "It's going to be ok".

We left the hospital in a daze, nothing made sense, this couldn't be happening. But all the time there was this voice, calming me.

Two days later we got the full diagnosis, a good prognosis but warnings that it was going to be tough. The worst was telling everyone. And then we came to here (Cemetery Road Baptist Church), to our sanctuary. I'll admit it was hard to walk

through the door, to face people, to deal with our emotions. But we walked in to so much love and then you all prayed and laid your hands on me and I could feel those doubts and fears leave me.

The day after that I started chemotherapy.

It was scary, it was strange, it made me feel strange and often sick but I had a constant presence of calm with me.

After a week, I received a letter from a friend and I just want you to read a small excerpt . .....

*“Clare, I have been praying for your recovery/healing, but over the days, my prayers have altered from prayers of intercession to prayers of thanks and praise. I have really felt God saying “it’s already done, she’s going to get better” and to pray for healing for you is showing a lack of faith. So I am thanking God for what He has already taken care of, already covered.”*

What a moment of strengthening. And there were many more like that.

During my second cycle I developed excruciating stomach pain, the doctors looked concerned (never a good thing) and I was sent for scans. I'll admit I was really scared, I tried to prepare myself for the worst news, doubt had well and truly got hold of me. But I prayed and God heard, the whispering voice of calm came to me again, but this time the pain was so bad, and so reminiscent of when I had first been admitted to hospital that I found it hard to keep faithful to the voice. I found myself surrounded by two consultants, one registrar and two doctors - believe me that is scary!

But they were smiling; OK, at that point they couldn't find the cause of the pain, but there wasn't any bad news, there were no more growths, in fact the chemo was working better than they expected. I got a thumbs up from the consultant, “You’re doing fantastic, it's more than working, I think it's gone.” Wow!

And then there were the intrathecal - lumbar punctures to you and me. I'd had some difficult ones, but one day it wasn't going well, the needle couldn't find the right spot, blood was being extracted rather than spinal fluid and the pain was tough to take. It was also taking a long time. I was given gas and air to help - a lot of gas and air! Bev was with me and in my semi conscious state I heard her say we were friends from church. All of a sudden I felt completely conscious, utter clarity came over me and I thought, “Why am I trying to do this on my own?” Silently I called out to God and I heard him say so clearly, “Why aren't you trusting in me?” and I let go and just praised God. "Got it" the consultant shouted, then touched my shoulder and said "your prayer worked"

Someone said to me at the beginning of the treatment, that God had said to them that this would change my life and if at the end I went back to my old life, if I hadn't changed then I had wasted this opportunity. So how have I changed so far?

Above all I have spent so much time with God, talking, listening, crying, laughing. I know him better, know me better, and I know that he has always known me better than anyone.

I've seen people in so many different states of emotion, I am less judgemental, more patient.

I am astonished by the strength of human spirit and how that is driven by the holy spirit.

I've witnessed to people, in what turned out to be their final days.

I shared communion, shared faith with different people.

I've seen first hand the difference knowing Jesus has in people's lives and deaths.

I've met amazing people and I've tragically lost some very special close friends.

I have changed but I know I need to continue on that journey. I am so blessed that I am now at the other end of treatment but the journey isn't over. I have been saved and I have asked, "Why me? when I have seen so many people die, why I am still standing here?" I didn't get a straight answer to that one. But I did get a message that God had plans. My biggest learning point I guess! God is in control, I needed to listen better, stop trying to plan life myself, stop thinking I had the answers that I knew where I was going or should be going. As with the lumbar punctures I have to let go and let God.

I feel truly blessed to have experienced these last five months. And above all I feel truly blessed to have you.

You will all have seen the Macmillan adverts on the television, where someone learns they have cancer and they fall. That's what it feels like, but you all came running, you all caught me and Nigel and the kids. You held us up with your prayers and you made all this so amazing an experience. The pastoral care of our ministers was phenomenally supportive and strengthening.

You were there with a meal for the family, a visit, a call, a text, a card. You took the kids for fun days out, you babysat so Nigel could visit me in hospital, you sent prayers, texts, messages. And above all you prayed. I felt every one of those prayers. And others prayed, other churches (Ecclesall Parish Church, Atherton Baptist Church to name two amongst many others) friends and family. I have lost count of those that have told me they have never prayed or certainly not for a long time but they started to pray for me - and they felt and saw the answer.

I have never experienced so much love demonstrated so openly.

A few weeks ago I saw the consultant who told me I had been given the greatest amount and the highest intensity of chemo-therapy that can physically be given to an individual. I was also told that, in their terms, I walked it. Believe me it is not because I'm as tough as old boots, it is because God walked it, not me. And he sent the most amazing foot soldiers to carry me along the way - you!

People say that at times like this you find out who your friends are. I didn't, I found out who my family was.

And so from the bottom of my heart, Nigel's and the kids, I want to thank you, my family.