



ANTHONY'S TESTIMONY

I was born into a blessed Lebanese Catholic family. I was the youngest of three children who were brought up by my mother. Growing up, I always believed in GOD and feared him, but being raised a Catholic I also believed in praying to Mary and the saints and all the rituals with it too. I grew up with no father to discipline me and my mother had to work 3 jobs for a while when I was younger to provide for us and give us a home. When I was four, my brother and sister and I were kidnapped

and brought back home after 3 months. Growing up without a father and with a hard working mother who spent so much time trying to provide for us, I wanted to be loved and found there was a lot of attention to receive and love from this world if I did what the world wanted. It was a path of destruction that I would chose down the track. By the time I was 13 people didn't even really think I lived at my mum's. By age 15 I was living in darkness and thought GOD was a good man upstairs who would forgive me at my death bed. At age 15 I thought the life I was living was my dream come true - all the attention I wanted finally paid off. Little did I know of the consequences and how temporary the pleasures were. I was young; I didn't realise what a boy living in a grown-up, sin-cursed world would do to my so-called fun, but inside I knew I had nothing. I thought Christians were weak and I picked on them. I always had to chase something new to help me wake up and get out of bed because I was empty.

My joy kept running out. Please don't think I want to glorify sin or show how bad I was to glorify me. I simply want to show you how I was ripped off by the devil, how depressed and fake that image of having a rough testimony is, and how good GOD is! I had a counterfeit, a fake – the dead hope and fake joy and dregs on the bottom of a glass while GOD offered me crystal spring water. I was deceived. I realised this sinful, so-called fun was a rip off. I could not be happy; I could not be complete. Even relationships didn't cut it. I couldn't figure it out - no one could say hello to me, I thought everyone was against me. I was scared of sleeping; I trusted no one. I was scared to drink water; even scared to go outside! Then someone taught me about hell and how it was eternal. They told me that if I didn't slow down and if I kept living for the devil that I would go there forever; not a week, not 10,000 years, not a million. I wouldn't be able to die and get out. It was a place where I would burn and never end. That's the first time I paused and thought about GOD as an adult. But it went in one ear and out the other; however it still sat in my heart somehow. I started to think as I went back into the world again.

This reminder about JESUS and hell started getting to me. I said to myself, "I have to try to live for GOD," so I started going to my local Catholic church on Sundays. Boy, did I feel good! I had started my tick list for heaven. After this I almost lost my life three times but I'm still alive by the grace of GOD. I wasn't saved then. The last time, I came close to death. I was in hospital and I thought to myself, "If I don't make it, will I go to heaven?" So I weighed my good against my bad and, boy, did I come out looking bad. I knew I couldn't make it on my own works. I had no power to pull myself from sin. I knew religion wasn't going to cut it. I knew I had no confidence to die, so I asked an Assyrian friend in the city one night because he did a Bible study at the Church of the East. He took me there and for some reason I knew without anyone proving the Bible to be the word of GOD, that it was the word of GOD. I didn't need to see archaeology, Bible prophecy, or manuscripts. I just knew in my heart that no matter what anyone said against it that this is the word of GOD. I was shocked to know that Mary shouldn't be prayed to, that saints weren't to be prayed to, that I didn't have to do the rosary, and most importantly that JESUS isn't just that man and a dead, pinned statue Son of GOD on the cross, but that He was also GOD who became flesh, the resurrected King! I was shocked to see the Bible say that HE created the world. However, all they taught me was knowledge; they never showed me how to be born again or to give my life to HIM and have my sins forgiven. Later on, I went back into the world again and my old ways. Then my cousin showed me a DVD. He said that this man was a Born-again preacher and he talked about some interesting stuff so I watched him.

GOD hit me in the heart with HIS good news at the end when there was an altar call.

You see, I always thought it was a scale of good and bad when I got judged; But this man asked me if I had kept the Ten Commandments, and I knew I was guilty all the way. I was expecting a holy GOD to say "No worries! Just come on in." When I heard of the free gift that was to wash me clean of all my sins and that I could never earn it, I was so relieved. It was free! It sounded too good to be true, but if GOD said it then I trust it because I know that the Bible is GOD'S word even though I couldn't explain it. Praise GOD! I know the evidence today that the Bible is GOD's word, but that day I dropped on my knees and prayed the sinner's prayer. Then I hunted for a Born-again church. One night, I was with my guys again out in Merrylands and I saw a church sign from a Born-again church advertising a Bible study, so I called the pastor and invited my cousin to come with me. I was a spiritual baby. I was taught that I could lose my salvation if I sinned again. I lost my salvation a hundred million times since then! Thank GOD that's not the truth! It's like being a Catholic all over again – I'm hanging on by my good works. When I heard them speak in tongues, I jumped! I was scared thinking it was those demonic encounters again. I asked the pastor politely in private about the tongues and he showed me in the Scripture about Biblical tongues, but I was a baby and lacked knowledge. Even though I wasn't comfortable, I said to myself, "Man, I can't argue with GOD!" So, I forced myself to gibber along with them. I was there for about a year and I didn't grow much at all. I still treated my mum bad and had an attitude with people. I wasn't violent anymore, but I still had addictions to drinking and smoking and taking substances. About this time my cousin George and Sonia Baho visited my house and I was excited to tell them that I was a Christian now because I knew they were Born-again. My mum had been telling me that since I was young, and I knew they

visited a Baptist church. They smiled and were happy for me. Then my cousin Sonia asked to look at my Bible. She opened it, went through it and closed it before asking me if she could buy a new Bible as a gift. I didn't think anything of it, but I agreed and they invited me to visit their church. Then I started going back to my church, and I invited several of my Muslim friends to come to my church. They were very supportive of me being a Christian now so they joined along with me to the church. My friend said to me, "I know I'm not a Christian or anything but I think you should visit your cousin's Lebanese church because this one is like a cult and the tongues thing is scary." Because he was a Muslim I didn't know if I should believe him, but I still wasn't convinced 100% of tongues so I cried out to GOD at work. "Please GOD, I don't know what pleases you, but I want to please you. If speaking in tongues pleases you, confirm it with me; show me. And if not, pull me away and show me what pleases you." I fell into sin again and cried out for forgiveness.

I repented and turned from it. I wanted to be honest so I rang my pastor up and tell him how I had fallen and asked for some spiritual advice. Instead, he put me out of the church and said that I should be ashamed of myself. Man, I was on my way back to the street and the world again! Then I felt GOD leading me to contact that American pastor who I watched on the DVD that led me to Christ. I emailed him and he replied saying that he didn't know many contacts in Australia but he knew one good Christian man named Nigel Taylor who could help me. He sent me an email with a list of Independent Baptist Churches that he knew were good. There were about 8 or 10 on the list but the closest one to me was Faith Baptist Church, so I decided to visit. Little did I know it was the same church my cousins George and Sonia attended and that my Muslim friend had told me to go visit that now turned out to be the closest one on that list! I heard the preaching and the love from everyone blew me away. I wanted to grow and learn more about GOD. Then I met Brother James, Brother Charlie, Brother Robert, Brother Angelo and Pastor Nabil who loved to go out of their way to feed me. Brother Robert gave me an answers book and GOD answered my prayer about knowing the truth about tongues. I learned more about the word of GOD in two weeks in this church than I did in one year at the Pentecostal church. I was baptized there on a theology that I could lose my salvation; I want to be baptized again because I love JESUS and want to obey HIS commands not because I have to do it so I keep my salvation. When I heard pastor preach and hold the Bible in the air and say, we only follow as HE follows the word of GOD and to test him with the Word that sealed the deal for me. My mother looks at me and though she is still a devoted Catholic she says that she doesn't know what happened to me but I am now polite, calm and happy and changed so much – not like that cult church I went to. She even wants to visit this church one day. The lord took me from being lost to being found, from darkness to light, from depression to joy, from meaninglessness to having a purpose. I could never read a book, yet I have no better joy than to study about GOD.

I AM A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST. AMEN