

## ***NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR***

I met Jason on his first Sunday in our church. My husband, David, had met him a few days earlier and just told me that Jason had a troubled past and wanted God's help. Little by little, as I got to know Jason, I learnt more about that past and his world of drugs, violence, abuse and crime.

To Jason, born and brought up on a rough council estate in South London, this world was normal. To me, a vicar's wife from a comfortable upbringing, it was not.

Jason wants to tell his story to people from his world – people who might think that God is not interested in them, or that their problems are too difficult to fix. As far as possible, I have let Jason tell his story in his own words.

This book is based on a series of interviews with Jason and his wife, Lorna, which were recorded and transcribed. Any words within quotation marks are their actual words.

If, like me, you do not come from Jason's world, you may find some of the descriptions shocking – especially where he relates his demonic experiences. But whatever your background I hope that after reading Jason's story you will see there is nobody that God is not interested in and no problem that is too difficult to fix.

# ***INTRODUCTION***

A few weeks before Easter, David was sitting in his study – in the rectory, next door to St Lawrence Church in Morden, South London. He had been in the job for only a few months and was drowning in admin. That Monday morning, he was desperately hoping for a few uninterrupted hours to work through his emails. Then the doorbell rang.

The rectory had a front door with full-length, clear glass. This was a bizarre choice. Whoever was inside could clearly see who was on the doorstep. Whoever was on the doorstep could clearly see who was in the house. There was nowhere to hide. And once David saw the figure ringing on the bell, he was certainly tempted to hide.

He had read stories of church ministers who had kindly (or naively) welcomed in strangers, then been attacked in their homes. Big, burly and vaguely menacing, the man on the doorstep fitted the stereotype of someone who might do exactly that. But David was a church minister, and welcoming strangers – however big

and burly – was an unwritten part of the job description. He opened the door.

‘Are you the vicar? I want to become a Christian.’

David hadn’t expected that as an opener. He ushered the man into the sitting room.

‘I need help,’ the man said.

In just a few minutes, he opened up about his experiences with drugs, violence, prison and the occult. He had seen things he couldn’t explain and he was scared. David considered recommending a mental health professional or drug rehab. But the man had asked for help, from his local vicar, and wanted to become a Christian. The other things might be helpful, but only the Lord Jesus can solve the root of all our problems.

Their conversation ended with David praying for the man, giving him a copy of Luke’s Gospel and asking him to come back on Friday for another chat. And with that David showed him out, thinking he would never see him again.

But he came back. And back. And back. Seven years later, he is a new person. In fact, he – Jason – is David’s church warden and right-hand man.

Looking back at the extraordinary ways God had worked in his life, Jason is overwhelmed by God’s love. ‘You would think I would be last on his list!’

Had David really known who he was dealing with, he probably wouldn’t have opened the door.

# CHAPTER 1

An old saying goes, ‘Give me a child until he is seven years old, and I will show you the man.’ Apparently modern neuroscience agrees. A child’s experiences in the first seven years of life are foundational – for good or bad.

Given his background, Jason never really stood much of a chance. According to the psychologists, he was doomed from the start. Statistically, because of the violence, abuse and poverty he experienced as a small child, Jason would almost inevitably end up as a violent and abusive adult.

Robbery was a family business. Jason’s dad served five years in Parkhurst Prison for armed robbery. His dad and uncle Trevor had robbed the Co-op depot. They had tied up the manager, taken him hostage, made him open the safe and stolen all the money.

As Jason puts it, ‘They had guns and all that – obviously. As they were walking up the road with the money and the guns, the flying squad nicked them. Someone had grassed them up.’

But at the time Jason didn't know why his dad was never around. The one time Jason visited his dad in prison, he claimed he was there doing a decorating job. As a six-year-old, Jason believed him.

And although some of the 'jobs' ended up with a prison sentence, others were more successful. On one occasion his dad and uncle had robbed a well-known jeweller. The robbery was covered in the press and the loot had to be well hidden until the publicity died down. Years later they dug it up and hid it under a bed in the family home – in Carshalton, South London – where Jason found it.

'I was playing upstairs one day and, for whatever reason, looked under the bed. I found this big bundle of gold – necklaces, rings, watches.'

Despite hauls like this, there never seemed to be enough money around. Jason's dad spent most of the proceeds, and his time, in the pub. When he got back, he would beat up whoever happened to be in the house. Jason's mum was the punchbag of choice, but the kids suffered too. 'I just remember the home being such a violent place. It was awful. There was always shouting and arguing. The police were round all the time.'

Lee, the eldest, three years older than Jason, hated being in the house when his dad was in, and spent more and more time at his nan's. But the rest of the family – Jason; his older sister, Sally; his younger brother, Kevin; and their mum – continued living there. They got used to a cycle of domestic violence, ending up in women's refuges a couple of times every month. One time his dad

found out where they were staying and tried to break in. The children were terrified. They learnt that there was nowhere they could really feel safe.

Jason took it on himself to try and protect his mum but, as a young boy, couldn't do much to help. 'When I was about eight years old, I went into my mum's room, and he was twisting her arm up her back. I just steamed into him. I punched him in the back. He turned round – and then I ran into my bedroom, jumped into bed, got the quilt, pulled it up over my head, and lay in the bed listening to see if he was there ... I thought, "He must be gone by now," so I pulled the blanket down – he was standing over me and he just went *blam* straight in the mouth. That was the kind of bloke he was at that time. I remember thinking to myself, "I'm going to kill him one day. How can you hit your kid like that?" I used to plot little plans in my head – "One day I'm gonna do him."'

Jason's dad was just repeating behaviour he had experienced when he was a boy. His childhood had been similarly abusive, and he had never known his father. His mother ran a brothel for the infamous Kray twins – probably the best-known British gangsters of the twentieth century. She rarely came home. When she did, she would turn up with different men who would beat up the children. Violence and crime was the only way of life they knew. 'My uncle was always robbing and thieving. My dad was an armed robber. His other brother was just a lunatic, stabbing and hurting people all the time. His sisters were pretty mad as well!' While Jason's

mum's family was 'better', his grandad did have links with various members of the South London underworld due to his work as a boxing trainer.

Jason was immersed in a world where sickening violence was treated as a joke, and being left bleeding in a gutter was to be expected if you 'slagged off' the wrong person. He remembers a particular time when some people bashed up his dad. 'They was walking home from the pub and my dad was slagging off a local gangster, which was silly really – and two geezers were waiting with crow bars. As he walked past the alley, they just smashed him over the head with the crow bars. And when he was on the floor, they was just standing over him whacking his head with the crow bars. It only stopped because one of the neighbours came out and said to leave him alone or they would call the police. Otherwise they would probably have killed him. He ended up being in hospital for three weeks with eye patches.'

Not only was brutality to be expected, but it was also laughed about. 'Two of his friends thought it would be funny to go to the hospital, to pretend that they had come to finish him off. He's in bed with his eye patches and they had nicked doctors' coats – because he was under police guard and things as well – and got into the wing, and into the ward, and into the room. And they said, "We've come to finish you off." Dad jumped up with his walking stick, swinging it around. They was just in the corner laughing.'



## CHAPTER 2

While Jason was on the receiving end of violence at home, at school he was the one hurting others. ‘I remember a lot of fighting at school. I think the violence started because he [my dad] was violent to me. As a lad I didn’t like feeling scared and that used to wind me up. In my head I thought, “I’m never going to bottle it from anyone. I’m just going to stick up for myself.” If anyone ever tried to bully me or put it on me, I’d fight back.’

Even by the age of six Jason was getting into serious trouble at school. One play time he beat up twelve children because they were teasing him about his second-hand clothes. He was summoned into the head teacher’s office, but rather than being punished, it was decided that he should see a child psychologist. Despite weekly sessions to talk about his problems and behaviour the fighting carried on. The efforts of his teachers, head teacher and child psychologist at infant school had achieved nothing. ‘Because I was getting it at home, I wouldn’t take it from anyone else. That was my thinking. I just wanted to be

as hard as I could be so I could fight back.’ At seven he moved from infant to junior school. He would still fight anyone, for pretty much any reason, but he was now stealing as well. ‘I was still fighting and getting into trouble. Thieving and stuff like that as well – nicking cars and all sorts of things.’

According to that old saying, and modern psychologists, seven-year-old Jason’s path was now set. He was a damaged little kid, who was already doing his best to damage others.

Jason was now at a new school where a less therapeutic approach was taken. Someone – Jason never found out who – decided that the only option was to put him into a home for disturbed boys. The home took lads up to the age of sixteen, and most were in their teens. Jason was only eight years old.

His time there did not start well. ‘Your first day there they have a disco for you. I was really nervous – scared – because when I got there, there was all these older kids. They were all thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, and I was just coming up to nine. The first day at the disco, this kid comes up to me. He was fourteen. Quite a tall kid. He tried to bully me and things. I just punched him in the mouth. I got on top of him on his shoulders and I was just smashing his face with a custard bowl. Then all the staff come in. They jump you and beat you up, tie you down to the bed, and that’s that for the night.’

The older boy was not just going to take being beaten up by a kid. ‘The same kid I had a fight with before tried