

A JOURNEY INTO THE FATHERS ARMS

- *Andy's Story*

Since October 2003, I have been here at the Fathers Arms. A real answer to prayer in my life. For 3 years I have prayed for this time but I needed to acknowledge God as number one in my life.

My Introduction to life

My name is Andy and I have been a Christian since 1999. I am 38 years old born in Saddleworth Yorkshire; I am the oldest of 4 children. My life started to go wrong at the age of four when my parents divorced and neither my father nor mother really wanted me because of my disability (no control of my bowels which I still suffer with today) it embarrassed my parents. So until the age of 11 I was passed between parent's grandparents anybody that would put up with me. It was a period of no real love in my life, which continued for many years. A time when I also lost all trusts in adults.

When I was 11, I was taken into care, a time when life should have improved but it got worse. Up to this time I had never been to school so I was put in a school for 'problem' children my first real label, a label I did not understand. This year in that school was awful and my trust in adults deteriorated. Then I was put up for fostering on this special scheme set up for 'problem' children (that word again) I was sent to a family in North Wales consisting of mum, dad and 5 daughters the reason why they wanted to foster a son. Being nearly 13 at the time this was great having all these girls around and they spoiled me rotten. 6 months in though, somehow I ended up in a full sexual relationship with my foster mum, something I have never really understood. God has shown me now that I was just the child in that relationship and I shouldn't blame myself. I eventually left my foster parents at 16 before anyone found out and it destroyed that family. From then until I age 34 I have lived on the streets in London for 2 years, became a compulsive gambler and been in and out of prison some 20 times for theft and deception.

I heard His Call

During this period I heard about God in prison especially from a chirpy little Irishman called Noel Procter who was the prison Chaplin in Strangeways, Manchester. He got right under my skin with his huge smile telling me 'Jesus loves me' all the time. Well those words came back to me and I ended up on my knees in Saughton Prison in Edinburgh in October 1999 asking Jesus if he really loved me, would he come into my life and change me because I had had enough. I was crying for the first time in my life and while sat on my bed Jesus came into that cell and into my life. I felt his arm around me and my head was leaning on his shoulder, a little later when I stood up I noticed two impressions on my plastic mattress, one clearly mine because of the size of it (I'm a big lad) and another this was physical proof to me that Jesus was real and he loved Andy.

Trying for a new start

When I came out of prison in the December 1999 the first 3 years were tough, I could not get accepted in a church because of my past and because now I know my attitude was not the best and I hadn't completely given my life over to Jesus. Early in 2003 after drifting about I thought I could cope and was strong enough to build a relationship with my family with no support and without God. In no time at all I was back gambling I had stolen some money and was facing prison again something I did

not want. I was desperate I thought about suicide but God was having nothing to do with it.

God is faithful even when we are faithless

He had other plans thankfully. After talking with friends and letting it all out I returned to face the consequences and for the first time in my life I decided to trust someone, that someone being God. When I got to court, God just took over because I should have got 2 years in prison but by the grace of God I got 12 months probation.

I booked into a rehab for compulsive gamblers because I had nowhere else to go. I went to a local church while I was there but it soon became clear I was beginning to compromise my relationship with God again and it did not please me at all. So I walked out of the rehab much to the annoyance of the probation service because I made myself homeless but I knew I had to please God alone. I told the probation if I had to live on the streets so be it, which they could not understand and still don't.

A new start, new life in a new area

I knew that something had broken within me and two days later I arrived at the **Fathers Arms**. It was then that I began to see and realize that God had wanted me to understand the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14: 25-33). Jesus loves me **REGARDLESS** and I must give him my life **REGARDLESS**, which is how I now live my life. God is the most important person in my life, Andy is DEAD and the resurrected and victorious Christ lives in me. Life in the Fathers Arms for me is very clearly a season of God preparing me for his work and purpose and that fills me with so much JOY. I am now and always will be fully reliant on God and I give all the praise and glory for what he has and will do in my life because no one else could and would have done what the Lord has done. THE LORD'S WILL BE DONE, NOT ANDY'S WILL.

Its about love, not a programme

I thank God also for the faith, obedience and commitment of Jon and Tamsin, their patience with me and their love is unconditional, the perfect demonstration of how we should be in our walk with God, never afraid to show your weakness, just happy to put God first in their lives. Without this I would be still drifting and not trusting, still lost. So I know the importance of this project and it is needed. Many others like me will benefit in the future. Ultimately all the glory and praise must go to our Father in Heaven who just loves us as we are, we were not made to be labeled, just to love him. We are all accepted regardless.