

VAL BLACKBURN



Val Blackburn (nee Sturgess) tells her faith story as part of [#SpeakOut2016](#) with the Diocese of Truro. Val grew up in Liskeard before moving to London, where she now lives.

“I grew up in a Christian family, attending St Martin's church every Sunday and thought I knew what Christianity was about. As a family we attended Spring Harvest and New Wine, we prayed before meals and I knew plenty of people who'd had various medical conditions miraculously healed, sometimes on the spot, by the power of prayer. Yes, I knew what Christianity was about: I believed in an all-powerful God, who granted wishes if you prayed to him, and then when you died you went to heaven.

As a lot of young Christians do I fell away a bit as a teenager; I wanted to sleep-in on Sunday mornings. Then when I was 16 I moved to London to go to theatre school and was living on my own. Although I loved acting I didn't really click with the people at school and was quite lonely. So one Sunday I went to church and met a lovely family who befriended me and eventually asked me to move in with them. But then I went to university, and was suddenly happy again, so I stopped going to church. I'd basically got into the routine of only going to God when I was unhappy and wanted something. Then as soon as I was happy again, I dropped Him.

After I broke up with my university boyfriend I was the saddest I had ever been. So naturally I found myself wanting God to fix it for me. One Sunday evening I started walking towards Southwark Cathedral - heading for a large church where I would be anonymous but which would make me feel better. However my legs kept on walking past the Cathedral, over London Bridge and into St Helens Bishopsgate. It was a church FULL of young people - about 500 people in their 20s! Unbelievable. Plus the service wasn't like any other I'd ever been in before, it was more like a bible based lecture: people were taking notes and there was a Q&A at the end.

At a point when I was at my lowest God had taken me to a fantastic church and sat me down next to someone, who just happened to have been in my year at university! My new friendships kept on pulling me back to St Helen's week after week, and I started to hear the Word properly and discuss it with them. I don't know how I had never really understood it before. At first I found hearing the Word very hard, and on more than one occasion was reduced to tears in the service. I don't know when I stopped resisting the message. But gradually over the years, as I kept on studying the bible and getting to know God better, it started to make sense.

Eventually my life lifted up out of that particularly deep trough: I loved my work, I had met some amazing friends (both in and out of church) and I met Alan, who I would eventually marry. However when my life started getting better, I didn't drop God again. I found that I need to continue my relationship with Him even though I am now happy in my personal life.”