



## CHRIS HALVAGI TESTIMONY

My full name is Chris Milad Halvagi. I come from a Syriac background and in mid-1973; my parents who were both born in Turkey migrated to Australia. I was born a little more than a year later, the last of 5 children.

Growing up in the suburb of Concord West, the family attended the Lidcombe Syrian Orthodox Church, almost every Sunday. One of my earliest memories of the church was the rather large grandfather clock towards

the front near the altar, and for as long as I could recall, the time was stuck on 10.45, am or pm, I wasn't sure. All I remember was, that I would stare for what seemed to be an eternity, wishing praying and hoping for the service to be over, not understanding a single word being preached, for it was being spoken in three different languages, other than English. Thus I might say, that from a young age, most of what I understood of God, I learnt from my parents which, to this day I can honestly say, I am most grateful for.

In my early teens, I attended Homebush Boys High School, and this is where I met a boy by the name of Robert Apps, a new Christian who eventually, through his life testimony, would lead me to the Lord. The amazing thing was that we didn't hit it off straight away and in fact even came to blows once or twice, and of course this all being before Robert was saved. What I witnessed in this young man was a 180 degree change, a totally new direction and outlook on life. No doubt this was only achieved by him having placed his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I decided it was also something that I was seeking. I started going to a lunchtime prayer meeting with Robert and a few other students, which was organized by a teacher, who also was a believer. Robert continued to encourage me with Bible verses and gospel tracts. The one that really got me thinking was the Chick Tract "This was your life." Not long after that time when I was about 15, kneeling beside my bed one evening, I decided to pray the sinner's prayer and trust Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. Wow,

what a night! I can honestly say this was the best decision I have ever made or will ever make in my life.

Well what happened the following morning was nothing short of a miracle. When I woke, from a great night's sleep I might add, I realized that indeed the Old man had moved out and the Holy Spirit has taken residence! I was, as they say, on fire for the Lord! I was witnessing to people anywhere and everywhere - friends, family, it didn't matter who; in my mind they needed to know the truth, and fast. I recall witnessing to the school bully, Omar Abdul Ramen, a Muslim boy, who it was said would always punch first and maybe ask questions later. I remember advising him, that his religion was false, and that if he didn't repent, that he was on his way to Hell! His reaction was to simply laugh at me, saying, "I just can't believe you're not scared of me." All I could think was, "What have I got to lose? If he kills me I'm on my way to Heaven"! As the apostle Paul once said in Philippians chapter 1 verse 21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

It was about this time that Robert invited me to an Awana meeting held at Condell Park Bible Church. He introduced me to one Lara Jekki. Well, what can I say, I was smitten, and that night went home and announced to my mother that I had met my wife! Although we were not married that very same night, but some eleven years later, bumping into each other every so often along the way, I still do believe this was not a chance meeting, but was God ordained. We have now been blessed, with three lovely children and praise God for that!

However as is often the case after leaving school and joining the workforce, I started to drift away from the Lord. I was trying to please my parents by attending their church, as well as occasionally attending Faith when it was at Croydon Park, in the hope of keeping the In-laws happy. But neither my wife, nor I, much less, God, was pleased at all with this arrangement. Now married with 2 children something happened that just put everything into perspective. My eldest fell ill, and then suddenly, my Mechanics business of 10 years just started to fall apart. As I began to bitterly argue with my work partner, the stress got so bad, I simply walked out, not really knowing what the future held for my family and me. And then, finally, at this point I began to pray not knowing what else to do. Suddenly it dawned on me what a hypocrite I had

been!! When everything had been going fine, I couldn't care less for God, but now that there's a problem, I'm praying like crazy. I gotta say I was convicted!

But the Lord is faithful, through all of these trials there was a light at the end of the tunnel. He provided me with a new job, and more importantly impressed upon both Lara and I, the importance of getting back to church on a regular basis, not only for us but also for the sake of the children. I might add at this point, my spiritual walk with God, was virtually non-existent, and I had been struggling in the workshop with controlling my tongue. Countless times, I had tried in my own strength to overcome the filthy habit, every time without success. When the Lord provided me this job opportunity, I decided to do something I haven't often dared do as a Christian, and that was to make a vow with God to stop swearing only by the strength of his mighty hand alone so that I would be able to be a true witness in the workplace, and, by God's grace, I have been able to fulfil this promise ever since. So in mid-07, Pastor Nabil suggested Metropolitan Baptist Church, since we were seeking a church close to where we lived. We started attending and later in that same year, I obeyed God's command to be baptized, but for me this was not as simple as it sounded. I faced much opposition from my parents and siblings. My Mother laid on the guilt trip, and when I thought it just wasn't worth it, again my Lord and Saviour came through, calming the troubled waters. I recall waking early the Wednesday before the baptism with a hymn I could not get off my mind and that I just could not ignore. The hymn played "It is well, it is well, With my soul, with my soul", and you know the rest. For me that settled it. The Lord had spoken! And who am I to disobey! I went ahead and was baptized Sunday 23rd of December 2007.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my testimony with you.