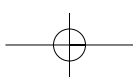
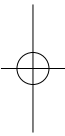
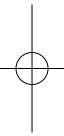


aftershock



For Esther and Bethany



aftershock

ADRIAN HOLLOWAY

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transforming lives together

AFTERSHOCK

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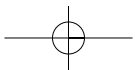
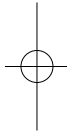
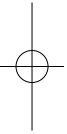
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thanks

I am indebted to my wife Julia in more ways than anyone reading this book could imagine. *Aftershock* was written while we were moving as a family from Oasis Church, Birmingham, to help start ChristChurch, central London, and without Julia's constant help this book could never have been started, let alone finished.

I'd also like to thank David Stroud, Adrian Hurst and everyone at Oasis Church, Birmingham, who released me from my usual responsibilities for an intense period of book writing. Oasis has been a fantastic experience for us. We love you all!

Where I have unknowingly repeated the words of other authors or speakers, I apologise.



introduction

Hi! My name's Daniel. I'm a freak. I'm a weirdo. Why? Well, for starters, I used to be dead. I was your average British teenager until I was in a car crash and died.

So the very fact that I'm here telling you I used to be dead means that I've kissed goodbye to normality. For example, when I'm at a party, people dare their friends to go up and talk to the 'near-death-experience-kid'. But that only makes me unusual.

What makes me weird is that I met someone while I was dead who's still with me now. He's right here beside me now. In fact he's inside me now, and I'm thrilled with him. Catching my weirdness yet?

Let me change tack and try to connect with you logically. You know that there are people who claim to have died and then come back. There's a certain type of magazine that'll print their stories. When you're in the waiting room at the dentist, you look at that pile of reading matter. You discard the stuff about making your home look beautiful and dressing your children the same colour as the curtains. Then you see a headline about 'Jane's Journey' – how so and so died on the operating table, rose up out of their body and looked down on everyone in the theatre. Then they saw a white light, lots of flowers and

their grandma, but then they're down from the ceiling and back in their body. It's all so beautiful.

If I were being paid by the University of California, I could trawl through every dentist's waiting room in the world, compile all such accounts, analyse the data, identify common features, interpret them in ways that make you feel better, and then write a stinking blockbuster. They're called NDEs – that's Near Death Experiences.

But I claim to have had a fully dead experience. Physically, chemically, I was fully dead, as my hospital records show. And unlike the NDEs you might have read about, most of which were good trips, mine was bad. So bad that I'd back my chances of getting on any daytime chat show. At the very least, I would expect to make *Trisha*

But having a bad trip is one thing. What's freakish with me is that when I came round, I was in love with a Jewish carpenter called Jesus of Nazareth. I knew off by heart bits of the Bible I'd never read. In fact I'd never even opened a Bible, let alone read any of it. There was nothing in my background to suggest any sort of religious interest. I had no previous knowledge of Christianity. It wasn't in there waiting to come out. I got it all beyond the grave! I found out that Christianity is true! My mum sent me to the psychiatrist – which I don't blame her for, but let's not go there yet.

The accident itself was caused by brake failure on a lorry that was right behind us on the morning drive to school. I was sitting in the back of my mum's car with my sister Kate next to me. Mum was driving with a pot plant on the passenger seat next to her. Then suddenly, this lorry thumped into us from behind, right into my seat. I was knocked out immediately, and they reckon I died about 20 minutes later.

And then I got the shock of my life! Some of you may have read about it, but now I'd like to tell you the rest of the story . . .

chapter 1

It must have looked like a scene from a soap opera: my mum and sister crouched round the bed watching the tragic teenager lying motionless. I was dead. Kate told me later that Mum persuaded the hospital to bend the rules and allow my immediate family in for two minutes to ‘pay their last respects to the body’. So when I opened my eyes, I nearly gave them a heart attack!

I don’t remember opening my eyes, but I do remember hearing a shriek, and then my mum’s hysterical crying. It was the first sign of life I’d shown. Then lots of shouting as a medical team crashed through double doors, wired me up and plugged me in. If you’ve never breathed through a facemask, I can only imagine it’s similar to being an astronaut. Every breath sounds like you’re making history. And I was.

Back from the dead, all I could think about was Jesus! He was mine and I was his! I had to tell everyone what happens when you die. That you get judged, and that you need forgiveness before you get judged. That you need Jesus’ forgiveness in this life. That when you die it’s too late. I wanted to tell my mum, who I loved so much. I wanted to tell Kate. I was so relieved that they were still alive!

Kate and my mum were both wearing dressing gowns. I

guess they were being kept in for observation, having been injured in the same accident as me, but they looked absolutely fine, apart from a cut on my sister's chin.

Try as I might, I couldn't say anything. I couldn't even feel my legs. Was I paralysed? I could hear things, but I couldn't speak. My jaw was locked and my tongue felt all leathery and too big for my mouth.

I fell asleep. My first few minutes of being a Christian had been a massive frustration – so much to say, and yet no ability to say it. But I was alive and ready to rumble! First, though, I wanted to know about the accident.

When you can't talk, people obviously assume that you're deaf as well, because on one occasion I heard Mum asking a doctor, 'How much should we tell him?' The doctor replied: 'It's up to you.'

The next day she asked, 'Should we tell him about the others?' This really got me wondering. What others? Mum and Kate were the only people in the car with me and they looked as if they'd escaped with nothing more than cuts and bruises. Who were 'the others'? Other people who got hurt in the accident? But we were a crummy little car hit by a lorry. That's like an eggshell versus a tank, isn't it? So there can't have been any 'others'.

At this stage it felt like I was only awake for a couple of hours a day, but the next clue was when I overheard Kate mention the word 'funeral'.

Then I woke up one afternoon to find a couple of complete strangers standing at the end of my bed dressed in black. I'd had lots of medical faces in my room, but the only proper visitors were relatives. I hadn't even been allowed friends. And now here were a random smartly dressed couple looking like death warmed up. He was balding with glasses, dressed all in black apart from his white shirt, and she was big with a black veil on her hat. This was spooky.

They smiled when they realised I could see them. ‘It really is very kind of you to let us come,’ the middle-aged man said to Mum.

‘That’s quite all right, Mr Mason,’ she replied. ‘We want to do anything we can to help.’

What was going on? How come all of a sudden this ‘Mr Mason’ and his wife had got promoted over Mikey, Pete, Andy and all my other mates I was desperate to see? Mum needed to sort her priorities on the hospital visitors front.

‘The school have been so brilliant about it. In fact, everyone’s been brilliant,’ Mum continued. And then came the moment I’ll never forget: ‘Did Daniel know Becky at all?’ Mum asked.

It didn’t hit me at first because I knew at least three Beckys. Then it was bombshell time when I put first and second names together . . . Becky Mason! Was Becky Mason dead? Becky Mason was the only Christian I’d ever known. The one person who could have told me about Jesus before I died! Was this her parents on their way to her funeral? And had Mum let them in because, somehow, Becky Mason had died in the same accident as me? That’s the only sense I could make of it.

I’d used Becky’s name as a swear-word when I was dead and facing for ever without forgiveness. I remember that I had wanted to give Becky Mason a piece of my mind. ‘Oi Becky,’ I’d wanted to shout. ‘Why didn’t you tell me? Only a matter of life and death, Becky! Or wasn’t it important enough?’ I’d felt cheated that I was dead and facing judgement and it was all too late. Any old day of the week, Becky Mason could have stopped me in the corridor at school, pinned me against the lockers, and said, ‘Look, Dan, it’s like this . . . when you die, you get judged and everything you’ve ever done gets laid out before you. It’s all recorded in books, and you’re gonna realise you’re not perfect. You’re not perfect enough for a perfect heaven. None of us are! That means you’re facing eternal

separation from God. Eternal death, Dan. You know – hell and all that. But God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to die in our place. Jesus is real. You need to accept his death in your place now! If you do you’ll go to heaven. Listen to me while there’s still time!’¹

She could have explained why it’s a problem for us to ignore God, and sin against him. She could have explained that we deserve punishment for our sin. She could have told me that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute, taking the punishment of all who trust in him. She could have drummed it into me that God so loved Daniel Adams that he gave his only Son Jesus to die in my place. She could have told me that forgiveness was available right now through faith in Jesus. She could have told me how great it was to enjoy a relationship with Jesus in this life.

But she didn’t. She never said a word. I only found out she was a Christian on the grapevine. It was just something that was a bit odd about her. You know how everyone’s got something different about them? One girl’s got a big nose, another has a boyfriend who’s 34, another’s rumoured to still be a virgin. I suppose, one day, someone had said, ‘Did you know that Becky Mason is one of those born-again Christians?’ It had registered, by which I mean I think I remember being surprised to hear she was ‘one of them’. I thought she was OK. Not the religious sort perhaps, but I hadn’t really given it a moment’s thought.

All things being equal, though, if Becky *had* slammed me against the lockers and off-loaded the truth about life, the universe and everything, I wouldn’t have listened. I would have thought she was a nutter, and wondered whether I’d fancy her if she changed her hair and lost some weight.

Even if she’d taken the subtle approach, and drip by drip told me about how much God loved me, by sidling up to me in the lunch queue and then bumping into me ‘accidentally on

purpose' here, there and everywhere around the school, I probably would have told her, 'Look, Becky, I appreciate you taking the trouble and all, but it's . . . well, it's great for you, but it's not for me. I'm not really interested. I'm not religious.'

Becky was dead! I felt dreadful. But then, like a shot of adrenaline into my bloodstream, I thought, 'Hang on a minute! If Becky's dead, then she's with Jesus now!' Immediately I wanted to go back. Just the thought of being with Jesus sent my head spinning. I thought of Becky – this fairly nondescript girl I'd never really paid any attention to. And to think that right now she's with Jesus.

But I still didn't know that she was definitely dead. Of course, I couldn't ask because I couldn't talk. But the following day we had a breakthrough.

'Daniel, if you can hear me, blink once for "yes".' The more attractive of the two nurses showed some initiative. At last, communication I could respond to, because I could blink!

Over the next week I did a lot of blinking, and then one morning it was as if someone had flicked a recovery switch on in my body. They brought me some toast, and without realising it I said 'thanks' out loud! Later the same day, I felt my legs go all tingly. I hadn't even bothered to get worried about what it would be like to be paralysed. Only now did the thought of being disabled send a shudder through me.

'Can you feel your legs?' the doctor asked. My 'yeah!' sent Mum into a lap of honour round the room. I love my mum!

'Dear God,' I prayed silently, 'please may Mum find out what you're really like. That you're not religious or boring or non-existent. That you're real and exciting and knowable. That you're a person, for crying out loud!'

Gradually I got my speech back, and my upper body movement. I wondered why God didn't just give me everything back straight away. But anyway, slowly I was getting back to normal.

Of course, I pitched straight in and told Mum and Kate everything that had happened while I was dead. I had to do it in bits and pieces 'cos I got so excited about it, and tired myself out describing the sequence of events. I wanted to do everything justice: judgement, Jesus on the throne, the books, the entrance to hell. I was gushing descriptions of each moment. It was all crystal clear to me.

Are you expecting me to tell you they were instantly converted? Well, they weren't. They just sat there looking completely blank. No questions. Just concern. It was a response I was going to have to get used to. 'He's got religion,' my mum said to the less attractive nurse, still thinking I couldn't hear. 'How does he suddenly know all this stuff?'

After thousands of years of speculation and enquiry about whether there's a God and what happens when you die, it's a bit demoralising to discover the answer and then have your own mum not believe you. I thought to myself, 'It's early days. Perhaps she thinks I'm brain damaged.' At the very least, seeing as I could now talk, I could finally ask her about our visitors, the Masons.

Mum told me that the mystery couple were linked to the accident. Remember when we had been shunted from behind by the lorry and had gone up and over the kerb? Well, with it being 8.30 am in the morning on a school day, there was a better than average chance that some poor kid was going to get hit by a car flying across the pavement at 40 mph. It could have been any one of the 1,000 students who walk next to that road near the school entrance every day. It just happened to be Becky Mason, the one Christian I'd ever known. She smacked her head on the concrete pavement.

So Becky was dead. How on earth were her parents coping? Were they Christians? I carried on with the questions. Mum had resigned herself to telling me the whole gruesome story of

the accident, and in fact she was relieved to get all the details off her chest. I was probably supposed to be traumatised by re-living it all, but I wasn't particularly. It seemed quite detached from me. Like a separate event.

As we talked on, I felt Mum wanted me to ask about the lorry driver. But why? I'd expected her to be angry with the lorry driver. I'd expected her to be threatening court action against him. She was the type.

'So who was driving the lorry?'

'You really want to know?' Mum replied looking worryingly close to enthusiastic.

When I nodded, she said something that almost left me speechless: 'OK, you can meet him tomorrow. His name's Alan. I'll bring him in to see you.'

I simply couldn't believe it. Mum was apparently on speaking terms with a man who'd nearly robbed her of her only son and caused Becky's death. Why was she being so positive about someone I'd expected her to hate? She'd even lined him up for a visit!

The next day, visiting time couldn't come round quickly enough. I was going to meet someone who'd killed me, even if it was accidentally. Would he be upset to see me in hospital? Was he going to cry? What does a crying lorry driver look like anyway?

Then Mum came in, and gave me a sort of pep talk about meeting him. Lorry driver man was obviously just round the corner. I could see him in silhouette through the curtains, moving his weight from one foot to the other. It felt all spooky again, like when Becky's parents had come in.

Then Mum said, 'Er . . . Dan, I'm afraid I haven't been entirely straight with you. I know you're wondering why Alan and I are friends, and we'll get to that, but in the meantime I need to tell you that Alan's here because he's got some bad news for you.'

‘What bad news?’ I snapped back, still wondering why my mum was on first name terms with this guy.

And then in he came, wearing a huge white neck brace. Whiplash would make sense, wouldn’t it? Facially, he was one of those people who you can tell was probably considered good-looking in his day. Now he was sagging everywhere, like a flat tyre you can still just about drive on. His stomach was hanging over his belt. He’d made no attempt to co-ordinate his blue T-shirt with his brown leather jacket and golden chain with a cross on it. He looked like London taxi drivers do on telly. He was one of those people who turn out to be like a caricature of what you think they’re going to look like. A real-life cartoon version of himself. I expected his interests to be stocks, shares and greyhounds.

‘All right, son?’ he asked in a rather too familiar way. He obviously didn’t know quite how to pitch it. Having tried the upbeat approach, he then corrected himself. ‘I’m so sorry about what happened.’

I launched straight in to what was becoming my standard response: ‘Don’t be sorry, because . . . er . . . look, I know this is going to sound strange, but while I was dead I got a taste of what happens when you die, and, well, er . . . Alan . . . I met Jesus!’

‘I know.’

‘You do?’ I said, incredulously.

‘Yes, I know because your mother told me all about it. I know you met Jesus, and oh, Emma would have been so pleased to hear you say that.’

‘Who’s Emma?’ He’d mentioned her in the past tense.

‘Dan, I’m afraid someone else died in the crash that I caused.’

‘Becky,’ I said, feeling relieved that it was only the Becky Mason story again. ‘I know about Becky.’

‘No, there was someone else as well as Becky. My daughter

Emma was in the lorry cabin next to me. She's dead, Daniel. She nearly went through the windscreen.'

I was too shocked to say anything. I simply looked at Mr Cartoon Lorry Driver and went blank. Time stood still. I think I just looked around the room shaking my head.

'But Dan,' he went on. 'Emma was a Christian! I'm here to tell you that Emma was the brightest, most vibrant young Christian you could possibly imagine, and nothing could have pleased her more than being called home to meet her Saviour.'

I gasped, then looked at Mum to see if she was as gobs-macked as I was by what he'd said. Was it really possible for people to be that positive about their own children being dead? Clearly it was! No wonder Alan the lorry driver had made such an impression on my mum. I'd never met anyone like him. I would have expected any parent so unfazed by death to be a bit unhinged and wild-eyed. Yet Alan, who'd so neatly fitted my category of a stereotypical lorry driver, was equally authentic when talking about his daughter being in heaven. I felt responsible for the whole calamity, even though I knew I wasn't. Yet here was the man who, I suppose, was responsible for the accident, and it had cost him his own daughter, and he was coping!

'Daniel,' Mum said, 'Alan and I have been talking about what you told me about . . . er . . . Jesus,' she mumbled his name into her shoes, clearly embarrassed, 'and I think Alan can help you.' It sounded patronising, but it wasn't. Clearly my mum was a changed woman. Previously, she'd never been able to get over things. She'd always be harking back to stuff that had happened to her years ago. What happened with Dad was the worst of it: a divorce with no closure, an open wound. She wasn't very good at moving on.

Yet here she was being all mature. Why? Just a month ago she'd gone through the most traumatic thing that had ever happened to her – a car accident that almost destroyed her and

her two children – and here she was coming on all sensible about it. She seemed to be taking the view that we were lucky to be here and that it didn't matter whose fault the accident was. It was obvious to everyone in the room that we had something to learn from Alan.

The next day, Alan was back. 'Look, Dan, your mum wants me to talk to you about the God thing. She doesn't understand, but I do, and she realises that. But she also wants you to see a psychiatrist.'

'What?'

'Hang on . . . And then she's happy for you to see your friends. She's not wanted them to come until now. That's the deal. She knows that you want to see your mates, but she's worried they might think you've lost it – you know, lost your marbles – if you tell them about judgement day and all.'

'Oh please!' I said, anger rising for the first time.

'But look at it from her point of view, Dan. She's got your best interests at heart. She doesn't want your friends to think you've gone mad.' And then, moving right up next to me, Alan whispered, 'Dan, I think I've gained your mum's confidence, which is pretty amazing considering it was my brakes that failed and me that caused the accident. You've got an awesome story to tell, and God's in this. I don't know why Emma died, I don't know why Becky died, I don't know why you experienced what you did and then came back, but I can see how God can bring some good out of all this mess. Just go along with your mum's scheme and I think I can see a way through for all of us.'

I had been desperately looking forward to seeing my friends. I knew that they would have wanted to see me, but Mum had been very evasive about who was allowed to visit and when. I was pleased I was going to get the chance I'd been waiting for. If anyone on this earth was going to be impacted by the change in me it was my closest friends Mikey,

Andy and Pete. If I saw this psychiatrist, Mum would then let me talk to my posse and that would be the start, I hoped, of the rest of my life. Surely this was why I'd been allowed back to earth: to tell the Petes of this world that there's a real God who loves them. I was a sort of matchmaker. I was going to play cupid between my mates and their Maker.

The psychiatrist thing had already been arranged. Alan's little chat was part of Mum's plan to make some sense out of the God talk I'd dumped on her and Kate. As it turned out, the visit of the shrink was a huge anti-climax. There was no 'Tell me about your childhood'. She didn't wear a white coat or have those bi-focal glasses, which I'd assumed were standard issue. She didn't have a deep soothing voice and there wasn't even a leather couch. I felt cheated. Dr Alice Bennett was her name. In her mid-40s, I'd imagine. 'So Dan, tell me what happened,' she said rather matter-of-factly.

I went through it slowly, as she made occasional notes, and smiled constantly. I started with how incredible it seemed to me to find out that when you're dead, you're not! The wow of consciousness. I talked about the grandeur of the angel, the bits of the Bible he read to me that had lodged in my mind. The majesty of Jesus, the Judge, on his great white throne. People being judged and sent away. The tour of the horrors of hell. The agonies, which still sent a shiver through me.

But here was Dr Shrink, sitting in front of me, who one day would stand before Jesus on judgement day. Where was she going when that great day arrived? To heaven or hell? 'Can I ask you, doctor – what do you think will happen to you when you die?'

'Daniel, I don't think we can ever know in this life.'

'But that's the whole point,' I replied, astonished that someone so intelligent couldn't see the irony of what she'd just said. 'The only way we can ever know what happens beyond death is if someone comes back. And even if you

don't believe a word I've said about what happened to me, Jesus has come back from the dead. And that's a fact of history.'

'Is it?' she asked, giving nothing away apart from an obvious hint that she thought it was a matter of debate.

I immediately realised that telling others wasn't going to be easy. If I took Dr Clever-Cloggs at face value, she was genuinely unsure whether Jesus did rise from the dead. *I* knew he had, but how could I convince her? I wasn't going to worry about it for the time being, because my mates were coming the next day and they knew what I used to be like. I was convinced that they'd have no possible way of explaining away the change in me.

It was a long night of anticipation. Having gone through the preliminaries with Alan (the acceptable face of Christianity as far as my mum was concerned) and the shrink (the reasonable face of all things reasonable), there I was the following afternoon, waiting for my three best friends to arrive.

I pretended to be asleep. They sort of tip-toed in, thinking that I was a fragile handle-with-care version of the Dan they used to know. I heard them sit down. Still silence.

'Aaagh!' I suddenly went.

They nearly died, jumping out of their chairs. 'Not funny, Dan,' Mikey said. He'd dyed his hair blond, which was a terrible mistake.

'What do you think you look like?'

'Mate, you're not looking too clever yourself,' Mikey replied. 'Your mum's been really funny about letting us see you. How the hell are you?'

I resisted the temptation to comment on hell. 'Yeah, I'm fine. Look, guys, I've got something to tell you all and it's going to take at least half an hour.'

'Dan, are you OK?' Pete asked.

'Never been better,' I replied, although this was plainly

ridiculous as far as they were concerned, looking at me in my hospital bed.

‘You’re going to give us a speech?’ Pete asked taking off his baseball cap and saluting me like a soldier. ‘What’s going on, mate?’

‘Listen up,’ I said. ‘I don’t know if you know anything about what happened. I really died in the accident. You can ask the doctors. But listen, there’s something beyond death. I experienced it all. It’s exactly what the Bible says happens beyond death.’

‘What the . . .?’ Andy tailed off.

‘Mikey, Andy, Pete,’ I used their names to sort of sound more dramatic, ‘we’ve been living in a fantasy land. The last three years, we’ve been going through life together, never giving a moment’s thought to whether there’s a God, whether we owe him for even putting us on this planet, for even making this planet. But he’s real. God made us. We all meet him when we die. Well actually, we meet Jesus . . .’ and I was off, rattling through what had happened to me.

About 25 minutes later I came in to land by saying, ‘We’ve been playing around with what’s seemed like fun, but it’s garbage compared to the sort of power and energy I’m talking about. You can know Jesus, guys. It’s the utter business. You can feel like this.’ I pointed to my chest to try and indicate that I was feeling this constant elation inside me. But I think they were so shell-shocked by my rapid-fire delivery that I’d lost them by this stage. ‘So what do you think?’

The longest pause.

‘Dan, you need help, mate,’ Mikey said.

‘No, hang on. What if he’s right?’ Andy broke in. ‘How does he suddenly know all this stuff – all this spirit-realm information?’

‘You’re not making this up are you, Dan?’ Pete asked. ‘Because if you are it’s in pretty poor taste.’

‘This is from the heart, guys. Look, I’m still me. I’m still Dan. I haven’t gone mad. It’s just that there’s something out there that none of us has ever thought about. It’s like this insane secret. God’s real, but they don’t tell you on TV or at parties or in clubs, or ever. As if it doesn’t matter. But it does! He does. He’s fantastic. It’s like a high, but you don’t come down.’

‘I don’t believe in God,’ Mikey said.

‘But why not?’ I asked.

‘I’m a scientist.’ Of course, this was preposterous. He was a spotty teenager.

‘So what?’ I asked, getting a bit annoyed.

‘Well, science has disproved the Bible,’ Mikey said. ‘We know so much more than they did thousands of years ago. Maybe they needed to believe in God back then.’

This was not going according to plan. Mikey, Pete and Andy were supposed to be thoroughly impacted by my compelling account of what’s really beyond the grave. My first-hand knowledge was supposed to trump whatever ill-informed views we’d all previously held on the subject. They were meant to ask me all about what Jesus is really like, and want to know more. And then maybe we’d pray together. And then one by one my whole friendship circle would start to topple like dominoes, as King Jesus swept through.

‘How can you prove God exists?’ Mikey asked. ‘How do you know God made us? What if we just happened? Why do we have to bring God into it? I mean, Dan, I’m not knocking what you’re saying; it’s just that you seem to have got faith and I haven’t. I just go by what I can see and touch.’

‘So how come Dan suddenly knows all this?’ Andy asked, challenging Mikey.

‘I dunno.’

‘Exactly. It’s a flipping miracle, that’s what it is,’ Andy said.

I liked the sound of this. Then a knock at the door. (I'd been moved into a different room by now.) It was Mum. She came in and it was reunions all round, and immediately we were off the subject.

I felt pretty knocked back by Mikey's scepticism. As they were leaving the room, I just had to go for it. 'Look, guys, you know I wouldn't lie to you. You know what we've gone through together. I'm telling you this because I want you to have this feeling. I want you to find out for yourselves how good Jesus is. You've got to listen to me. I don't want you to go to hell.' That word again. I'd embarrassed my mother.

The mood in the room frosted over, but I persisted: 'That's the reality. Life's not just some mysterious free gift that we just make the most of and then forget about. If we don't live for God, we face the consequences. Hell's awful. It's a nightmare, but it's a real nightmare.' I was losing them. 'Listen to me . . .' I was reaching out to them emotionally by this stage.

'Dan . . . look, you've changed so much,' Pete said. 'There are so many questions. Let's just chill and next time we can talk some more. It's great to have you back, mate. Respect and all that.'

'Bye, Dan,' Mikey said, but couldn't quite look at me as he said it. This wasn't good.

They left and I felt utterly crestfallen. My mum went out and I was left all alone.

'What's happening?' I said out loud to God. 'Why don't they believe me? What's going on?' I thought about Mikey's question: 'How do you know God made us? What if we just happened? Why do we have to bring God into it?' My answer was that I just knew. And if dying and meeting God myself wasn't good enough for Mikey, then I was stumped. I hadn't thought there'd be any need for answering questions. I'd thought people would just believe me. But

the reality was that Mikey's question was the start of an earthquake. For the next year of my life I was going to ride the aftershock.

chapter 2

Out of hospital and back at home, I was a minor celebrity for a few weeks. Well, to be precise, I made the local paper.

It took me almost five months to recover enough to go back to school, initially in a wheelchair, then on crutches, before finally getting full movement back. I still got severe back pain and sharp twinges in my neck.

By the time I'd gone back to school, which was just after the Christmas holidays, I'd read loads of the Bible, so the novelty factor of 'How come Dan Adams knows so much about the Bible?' had worn off. Also, it was becoming obvious that I had missed so much work at school in my final year that I'd never catch up. It was January already. They decided that I could stay on and see out the year till the summer, but that I wouldn't have to do the exams. Then I could repeat all three terms with the year below starting in September. Well, that was a huge weight off my mind. I had from January till June at school with no pressure as far as work was concerned. I had a school to win for Jesus, so the more time the better.

Oh yeah – I need to tell you about church. I desperately wanted to meet Christians. These were the people who were sitting on the world's best-kept secret. Talk about a conspiracy of silence. My curiosity levels were sky high that first Sunday out of hospital.