

walking on solid ground

with
Katie Kyle



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I STOOD ON the beach, my teeth chattering uncontrollably, a towel pulled tightly around me. I waved to my mum. She was in the choppy Cornish sea, waving back at me.

The year was 1989 and I was 11. We were spending the October half term in a remote fisherman's cottage, with no phone and no signs of human habitation for miles. I was in charge of my younger siblings as we watched our mum completing our silly dare - to swim in the icy waters. My mum waved again and I waved back. She was further away from us by now. I noticed that her head was under the waves more often than it was out of them. Then came the sickening realisation that we weren't exchanging waves - I was watching my mum drown. I charged into the sea but the gentle surf of a few moments ago had become a wall of waves I couldn't break through. I left the beach, scrambling up the path in search of help, punctuating my burbled, incoherent prayers with screams. 'Please God, save Mummy.' And then a man appeared on the path. I pointed to my mum and he pulled off his coat as we hurried down to the beach. As I thanked God for this man, his wife appeared. 'You're not going in there,' she stated. The man put his coat back on and stared, as helplessly as me, at the huge expanse of grey swallowing up the speck of a woman.

And then something strange started to happen. The speck stopped moving out to sea and began moving eastward. We tried to follow, clambering along the rocky shoreline. A small outcrop of rocks appeared, previously hidden

from view, jutting out into my mum's new path. Within minutes, the waves were dashing her against them. As my new friends pulled her lifeless, bloody body from the waters, I assumed she was dead. But then she raised her head and I knew I had witnessed a real-life miracle.

By the time I was 18, I had started to drift away myself on a sea of depression, leaving my frightened family helplessly watching on. They and their friends prayed desperately for me. This time the vast expanse of nothingness lasted, not minutes, but almost a decade as the prayers appeared to go unanswered and I started to disappear from view.

As AFCU launches its year of prayer, I've been reflecting on how and when God answers prayer. Generally, when we pray, we want the immediate and dramatic sort of answer that saw my mum plucked from danger, not the ten year wait that I experienced. It begs the question of whether God was more interested in my mum's plight? Why was he slower to act when it came to me? Why do some prayers seem to fall on deaf ears?

It's only as I emerge from those problems that I feel I have some answers. God's rescue plan for me was more complex than my mum's but he moved as powerfully for me as he did for her. He wanted to treat the causes of my problems, not just the symptoms, and that took time. If God had 'zapped' the depression, it wouldn't have been a complete healing, rather a fragmented

one that left other issues untouched. God's rescue plan for me wasn't evident until I was well on my way to restoration. Now I can look back and see a similar path to the one my mum trod. As I drifted into danger, God's current tugged me towards 'land' - towards marriage, children and a much stronger faith.

A lovely thought came to me as I was writing this. When I was in the depths of my problems, a friend shared with me a picture she had in her mind's eye of me walking on a beach with Jesus. I remember the peace that this brought me at a time when I was in turmoil. I have described those years of my life in terms of drowning but it occurred to me that I was actually walking with Jesus on solid ground the whole time, whether I was aware of it or not.

A friend recently said to me that God doesn't always give us what we want. He gives us what we need. Sometimes it seems as though our prayers are being ignored. There may be waiting involved. The answer we get may not be what we had in mind. That can be uncomfortable and leave us struggling to keep faith in the idea of a loving, all powerful God. But I am now convinced he is just that - a loving, all powerful Father with a perfect rescue plan for each one of us.