



“Please God, could you throw me a bone?”

I was 11 years old when my Dad left home; to where and why he left I had no idea. I was heartbroken. My grades plunged, and being stuck in a British Boarding School at the time I had no family to turn to, no teacher I could talk to, and no true friend I could confide in.

Talk about feeling forsaken, abandoned and betrayed. I hated life and hated people, to the point I became such an angry, nasty teenager I was expelled from school at age 16, which only made me feel even more abandoned, sensitive and angry. So all it took after that to make me contemplate suicide was a friend who ditched me. I was an emotional wreck, a social pariah, a lost little chap who didn't believe anyone was genuine. I much preferred the company of my dog than people.

And here I am in my seventies and I'm still sensitive to how people react to me, and I can never get rid of the feeling that socially and spiritually I'm always on the outside looking in. So I wasn't surprised by the story I heard of two ministers in an elevator and one saying to the other, "I don't know how that Buck chap ever became a minister." I couldn't but help agree.

It struck me the other day, though, that looking back over my years in the church and being married, how close I'd get to the edge of either giving up or jumping off a cliff, and being stopped before I said or did something really stupid. My potential for stupid has been huge because of my background, so it's become vividly obvious when I've been stopped in my tracks.

I can now recall dozens of times when I've been rescued. In my hour, minute or (more likely) second of need I wasn't forsaken, ditched, or left on the outside looking in. But it's only now, looking back, that I see that pattern occurring again and again, and I'm having to admit it had to be Jesus' doing, because it smacks exactly of who he said he'd be for us.

But that means he's that personal. He knows what happened when I was 11 years old, and no way could I have got this far sixty years later on my own strength. I would have been dead long ago, probably from drugs to hide the pain.

And, amazingly, I had the chance to explain all this to one of my kids who'd hit the wall in their life too. There'd been a broken marriage, and several other awful relationships that drained my child of all trust in people. It was like a nightmare revisited, because the same mistrust had happened to me.

My child then made a request: "Could you ask God to throw me a bone?"

Well, I'd never been asked that by anybody before, so would God - the Father, Jesus or the Holy Spirit - do a thing like that? Does he, to quote the meaning of throwing a dog a bone, "placate someone by giving them something trivial or of minor importance or by doing some small favour for them"?

But he'd thrown me many a bone just when I needed it, so I knew he'd worked that way in my life. And if he hadn't thrown bones my way at just the right time I'd have been a snarly dog not worth living with.

It was based on my own experience, then, of a saviour who's clearly not opposed one bit to throwing bones to desperately hungry dogs, that I put in a slightly shaky request to him for a bone to be thrown my child's way. I put in all sorts of add-ons, like "I'm not asking for any special favours," and "According to your will too, of course," and all the usual things we throw in to a request to God when not quite sure if it's kosher. But I trusted him to know what was best according to the circumstances.

I don't know why I didn't expect much to happen. It had happened dozens of times to me. Did I not believe he could be just as personal for someone else in desperate need looking to him for help?

An answer came through only a few days later when my child phoned to say, "I only asked for a bone, Dad, not the whole carcass." And out came this amazing story of rescue that simply confounded coincidence. It had the fingerprints of Jesus all over it. No way could he hide it was him. Forensically he hadn't even tried to cover his tracks.

To think that he was now doing the same thing for my child that he'd done for me. A life of having bones thrown at just the right time. Even whole carcasses. What a saviour we have.