

# Hospital agonies drove us to God



Locks Heath couple Paul and Sam Prior with children Aaron, aged two, and Jadon, aged 10 months. It was the possibility of losing Aaron at four days old that prompted them to start praying

**IT'S difficult to imagine a more agonising scene.**

Paul and Sam Prior's son was just four days old and needed major heart surgery. They sought refuge in the hospital chapel, choked back

tears, lit candles and pleaded with a God they didn't really believe in for little Aaron to pull through.

As they sat, clinging to each other in desperation, they felt the Holy Spirit touch them in a powerful way. And not only did Aaron survive, but he surprised doctors

with the speed of his recovery.

That Sunday, the Locks Heath couple visited nearby St John's Church to thank God for answering their prayers. It was the start of a journey that saw them embrace a life-changing Christian faith.

Aaron, now two years old, still faces the prospect of a complete heart transplant. But they now know and trust God to help them through future traumas.

Sales manager Paul, 44, said: "I had always said that I was agnostic. I simply couldn't see the value in Christianity at all and I would always feel very agitated sitting in churches for weddings or baptisms.

"But desperate times call for desperate measures. The chapel of rest was on the same floor as the intensive care unit, and we did a lot of praying, lighting candles and pinning our prayers to the board.

"It was a powerful, emotional time. Now I can look back and say that we felt the Holy Spirit at that time."

Aaron was born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome – which means he doesn't have any left ventricles, or chambers, in his heart.

It puts enormous pressure on the right side of his heart, which has to pump blood around his body by itself. The couple had Aaron baptised after three days in case he didn't survive the operation the next day.

Since then he has had two more major operations as well as continuous treatment.

The chances are that he will need a heart transplant when he is a teenager because his own heart won't be able to cope with adult life. His condition affects one baby in

5,000.

"He has always come through surgery incredibly well," said Sam, 32.

"The doctors can't believe the speed of his recovery. His first and third operations were scheduled, but his second one came when he was two months old and came because of a life-threatening problem.

"Heart failure is always a possibility for him, so he is on medication all the time. He also gets breathless very easily. But to look at him, you might not realise there is a problem – he runs around like a normal two-year-old."

Sam and Paul could easily have forgotten about God after their initial prayers were answered, but

"I could see a lot more value in things. I was promoted, but I realised that there was more to my life than money and career. We became less materialistic, and I don't think I'm as judgemental as before."

The couple are grateful to those at St John's, Locks Heath, who have prayed for Aaron and supported them over the past couple of years.

They are part of a prayer chain of people who they can call on if anything happens. Paul has now also helped lead an Alpha course himself, and Aaron has been welcomed into the church family in special services.

And Sam said: "Last year Paul was made redundant, which could

## my faith

**The latest in our series about people from our diocese changed by faith focuses on Paul and Sam Prior, who pleaded with a God they didn't really believe in for the survival of their baby**

instead they felt they should thank him. They went to St John's, Locks Heath, after his first operation – to a packed-out carol service.

"It was a big experience for us to go to church, but we found ourselves in tears at that service too," said Paul. "We met the vicar, Peter Ingrams, and everyone was very welcoming.

"We felt uneasy that we didn't know much about things, so they suggested an Alpha course. That gave us knowledge and a new circle of friends.

"We then went on a confirmation course and were confirmed. It all seemed like a natural progression. And all the time our prayers kept being answered.

"I had been a bit of a jack-the-lad, but people started to notice drastic changes.

have been very stressful, for us to lose the one income we had just when I was pregnant with our second child, Jadon.

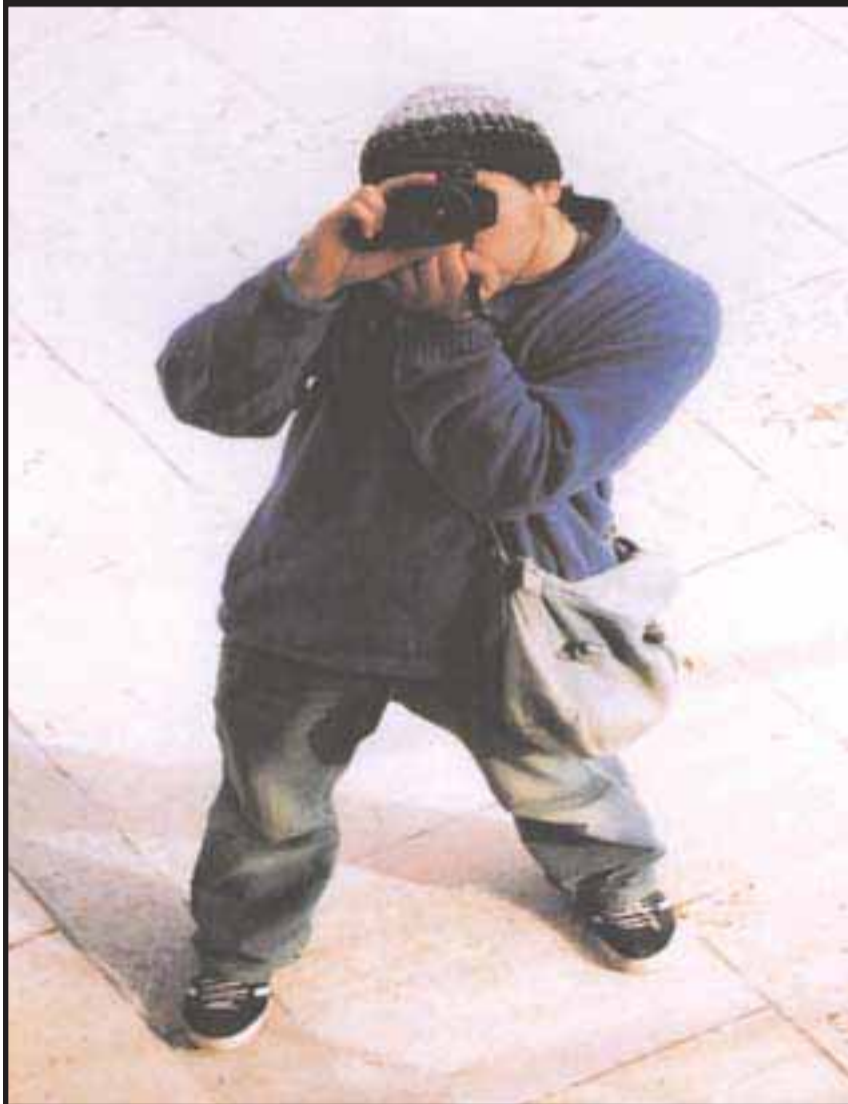
"But it actually made us stronger together. We believed that Paul would get a good job, and that helped us through a tough time.

"Aaron being born was an event that changed our lives in lots of ways.

"Although it was a sad situation, we can see that it has helped us as well. We know things might also be tough in the future, but we know that God will help us through those times too."

● *Do you have an interesting story to tell about how your faith affected your life? Contact Neil Pugmire on 023-9282 5731 or communications@portsmouth.anglican.org*

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