

# Reading the Bible sparked my belief

**WHEN her husband bought her a Bible for Christmas, Susan Hayles just started reading – and discovered she couldn't put it down.**

The 46-year-old nurse had never been interested in religion, and had only come to church for weddings and funerals. But when her husband Steve gave her a Study Bible last Christmas, she couldn't resist picking it up. She started with John's Gospel on Boxing Day and found herself in tears as she read about Jesus's death for the first time.

After a couple of weeks, she got in touch with St Luke's Church, Southsea, and asked to join the congregation. More recently, she was baptised as a mark of her new Christian commitment.

"I work as a staff nurse at a local hospital," said Susan. "Last summer I was looking after an elderly patient. She told me she had four sons called Matthew, Mark, Luke – and said I could guess the name of the fourth. But I didn't know – I'd never heard the names of the four gospels.

"I was so embarrassed because it was something from the Bible, but I didn't have a clue about it. I told Steve when I went home and he remembered. We often give each other one random present each Christmas, so last Christmas he gave me a NIV Study Bible. I laughed when I got it!

"I kept looking at it, but I didn't know where to begin. I looked online and it suggested John's gospel, so that's where I started on Boxing Day. I started to read it and I haven't put it down since!

"I have been so engrossed and the stories have really come alive. When I read about Jesus being crucified, I was in tears. I'd never been moved by a book like that before. I had started reading it just like any other book, but it jumped out at me and meant so much."

Susan had been baptised in a C of E church as a baby, so she decided to look online for a C of E church. She came across the website for St Luke's Church in Southsea and sent a tentative email asking the vicar if she could turn up on Sunday.

"It was the photos of people that convinced me," said Susan.



Susan Hayles (above) baptised by the Rev Annie McCabe and Bryan Stephenson and (right) with her NIV Study Bible

## THE ORIGINAL EMAIL:

**Sent:** 13 Jan 2017

**From:** Susan Hayles

**To:** St Luke's Church, Southsea

Hello I hope you don't mind me contacting you. I received my first ever Bible this Christmas, and have been engrossed in reading it. I also listen to Bible Study podcasts to help me make sense of it. I now feel that I would like to attend a service. But I am so nervous about it, I have never been to a service before apart from weddings and funerals. Would it be acceptable for a brand new newbie to come to church - if so, when is your service? I have been reading

the NIV version of the Bible is that ok?

With kind regards Susan Hayles

## SUSAN'S FAVOURITE BOOKS:

Jonah, John's gospel

## SUSAN'S FAVOURITE VERSES:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8: 38-39)

"They looked like ordinary people, and I thought I would fit in."

The vicar, the Rev Annie McCabe, couldn't quite believe it when she read Susan's email, but

Susan. "But Allen, who I sat next to, had been to church all his life and set me at ease. I've been coming ever since.

"I've kept on reading the

## my faith

**When Susan Hayles was given a Bible for Christmas, she started reading it - and became captivated immediately by the story of Jesus. Now she's found faith and has been baptised**

reassured her that she would be looking out for Susan that Sunday. Annie sat Susan next to a regular worshipper who was able to talk her through everything that was happening in the service.

"I was really nervous," said

Bible, and probably read about 90 per cent of it now. I read a Psalm and Proverb each day, and I write down verses that mean a lot to me in my journal. I have a devotional time each morning and that sets me up for the day."

and talk to God all the time, and know that I'm not alone any more. My life is full of purpose – before I was going to work without any sense of purpose and every day felt the same, but now it feels like a light has been switched on.

"I asked Annie for other suggestions of books to read alongside the Bible. I've really enjoyed books by Paula Gooder. And I approached her to say 'What do I need to do to receive the bread and wine?'

"I was baptised at Pentecost by full immersion. I'm actually scared of water, so I was having to trust in God. It was amazing.

"Then I came to the evening service to have the bread and wine for the first time. It was so emotional and the tears were overwhelming."

Susan also received a cross as a Christmas present with her Bible. At her baptism, she explained how the significance of wearing a cross had changed for her since coming to faith.

"It was no longer a piece of jewellery but a sign of new life and closeness to Jesus's death and resurrection," she said.

"I get a lot of joy from my church family. And now I'm living through the Christian year – going through Easter and then Christmas for the first time.

"Steve came to my baptism, but he hasn't been to church since.

He's encouraging, and he doesn't mind me reading the Bible. He's also quite knowledgeable, so we can discuss things."

The couple also decided to tie the knot properly, getting married in Turkey earlier this year after talking about it for years.

And Susan is joining one of the church's book groups, which use Bible Society resources to study individual books such as Ruth or Ephesians.

"It was definitely the Bible that brought me to faith," she said. "I wouldn't have come into church and my whole world wouldn't have changed if I hadn't read it. Now I've bought a different translation of the Bible, so I can read it all over again!"



Susan had also never prayed before, but began and was encouraged by Annie. A few weeks later, Annie suggested keeping a prayer journal. To her surprise, Susan had already started one. She now writes down her prayers, insights from her readings and reasons to give thanks.

"It has made me more confident at work," she said. "Sometimes there are horrendous things that happen, and I can take a second out and pray for God to help me to be the best nurse I can be.

"I'm also more confident about being open about my faith and people talking to me about it. I can answer people's questions about faith, as God has joined the dots up for me. Now I can pray