

# Taking the plunge

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everybody. Good morning. Got to pray for twice there. There you go.

Following Jesus, because you love him, because you've come to know a person, because you trust him, but maybe not knowing how you're going to fare. I could stay in that relationship, you think, but I'm going to walk away.

I could fudge the numbers at work, but I don't. You might be sitting there thinking, that's exactly how serving feels right now.

You could think, you know, I could have fenced off my Thursday and Friday nights, could have curled up in front of the sofa every Friday night and Ben and Jerry's in hands, but you decided to be a youth leader instead.

You could have quit that rota. You could have quit that ministry long ago. But you've poured in that time, you've poured in those years, you've poured in that energy into that thing, that thing that you maybe used to find quite easy when you were a little bit younger.

[ 1 : 39 ] You kept going. Maybe where relationships are difficult, but you've kept going. And you keep taking the plunge. That's what the Christian life is like.

It starts like that, doesn't it? In baptism. It keeps going. And deep down, I think we expect something from taking the plunge. Not prosperity gospel, but, you know, just a little bit of evidence that God's with me.

That God cares for me. That he's committed to me. And then it doesn't come. Then it doesn't come. Prince Charming didn't come when you left that relationship.

Work actually got a bit harder when you sacrificed. When you wanted to follow Jesus. Instead of fudging those numbers. Maybe serving on that ministry is still a slog.

And you think, is he with me? Is God committed to me? Then maybe life is just quite hard for you right now.

[ 2 : 54 ] Maybe you're going through a period of illness. A long period of illness. Maybe children who haven't come to the Lord. And you pray and you battle through the illness.

But it doesn't get better. You might even, it may be in your worst moments, you think, actually, do you even love me? Do you even love me?

Well, that's where they are in the book of Malachi. Where we're starting at a new book now. If you look at verse 2, that is what they're saying. Look down at your Bible. I have loved you, says the Lord.

But you ask, how have you loved us? They're actually a generation on from Haggai. The ones we were just looking at. And their parents, they took the plunge.

And they uprooted their settled life in Babylon. To come and rebuild Jerusalem, the temple. And you can kind of imagine the conversation. I think it's quite a familiar conversation that goes up and down the country.

[ 3 : 57 ] Now, we've got to move because Daddy's got a new job 500 miles away. But don't worry. It's going to be great. Don't worry. He's rebuilding the temple. It's going to be great.

But it didn't turn out great. Because life for them is a generation on. It's for those kids. It's bleak. They're now under Persian rule. And they're getting really cynical.

Yeah, right, you loved us. Yeah, right, you loved us. Really? Now, listen, you might not be there yet. But you can see how someone or you could get there. There's only so many times that you can take the plunge in the Christian life.

Take those risks. Years of sticking with the ministry. Years of sacrifice. Years of discouraging comments, maybe. Before you start to say, not only kind of do you care, but it might even trickle into, do you even love me?

[ 5 : 00 ] Do you love me? We need to be prepared for when that time comes if we're not there yet. Here's the encouragement today. Don't look down at your rotten circumstances to figure out if God loves you.

Look back to God's past love. Look to the future for his future love. Because we have a God of abundant mercy.

Firstly, we are loved because we are mercifully chosen. Mercifully chosen. Have a look down at verse 2 again. I have loved you, says the Lord, but you ask, how have you loved us?

Bit of ungrateful sneering, isn't it? In the next couple of weeks, we'll see that they're really far gone. They're compromised. Well, they're barely hanging on, shall we say. They're quarter-hearted.

Not half-hearted. Quarter-hearted in their worship. But here's God's antidote to that. We'll get there in a few weeks. But here's God's antidote to what they're saying today in verse 2. Was not Esau Jacob's brother?

[ 6 : 17 ] Yet I have loved Jacob. I have loved you. He says to them, go back to season one of your origin story.

Jacob, the father of your nation, Esau, his brother. I set my love on him and therefore you all the way back then. All those years ago, my covenant love, my ironclad commitment kind of love, my marriage kind of love, my I do for richer, for poorer, better for worse.

And here's the thing. God could have so easily committed to Esau. But he chose Jacob, even though he's no better.

Now, what was Jacob famous for? Jacob, well, he was famous for cheating his brother Esau out of his birthright. A bare-faced liar, a con artist, a rat bag. Look, and actually, if you were choosing a figurehead for God's people, you'd pick Esau.

I think I would. You know, he's a man's man, hairy, he hunts, he eats meat, he probably bench presses at the gym. Instead, God sets his covenant love on skinny, scheming, lying, living in his mum's basement sort of guy.

[ 7 : 36 ] Jacob. Verse 2. Was not Esau Jacob's brother, declares the Lord? Yet I've loved Jacob. It so easily could have been Esau.

You literally came from the same country, from the same time period, from the same parent, from the same womb. You're literally twins. And you're no better than him. Yet I chose to set my love on you.

It's a bit like the PE teacher, lining up all the players and choosing the person for the team that always actually gets picked last.

Sir, why did you do that for? And God did show that in every generation, didn't he? The exodus, the manna from heaven, a kingdom, a promise of a king, bringing people out of exile.

Rebuilding the temple. Israel is kind of like one spouse saying to another, you never love me.

What? I always put my needs ahead of yours.

[ 8 : 37 ] I always pay attention to you. I do show my love to you all the time. Israel, I have loved you.

And it started all the way back then. I chose to love you, even though you're no better. We know we're loved when we look back at God's past love and his mercy.

Now, we might struggle with this. We might think, how is it fair that God didn't choose to love Esau, but love Jacob? It's a good question, and we'll have some more teaching on this sort of thing at some point.

To save your questions for then. But here's a better question to ask, I think. How is it fair for God to choose to love anyone at all?

God shows us, if we believe in Jesus, God shows us, before the foundation of the world, to love us to the end.

[ 9 : 46 ] But it's not like we stand deserving. We're not even neutral before God. Like Jacob, we're all ugly brides for God to rightly reject. And it would have been so loving for God to just show mercy to one person, wouldn't it?

But the fact that God has set his love on billions of people, billions of completely unworthy, undeserving, God-rejecting, God-hating, idol-worshipping sinners, like me, like us.

That is an incredible, incredible act of love and mercy, isn't it? That if you know the Lord Jesus today, well, God has been incredibly merciful to you.

He gives you everything in Jesus. Forgiveness, life and hope and peace. And we deserve none of it.

I've said this before up here. I'm going to say it again. But what is the difference between churchgoers in here and non-churchgoers out there?

[11:00] Of course, God's transforming us by his spirit, you know. But apart from that, by nature, nothing. Think about all the lovely people that you go to work with.

People you live next to. Really nice friends. Are you better than them? No. We're all in the same boat.

We're all undeserving sinners. The only difference is that we're a people who've been shown mercy. Nothing to claim, nothing to boast about.

Does that humble you? It should humble you. It humbles me. God chose to show mercy and love and the blessings of salvation in Christ to me.

To fill the foundation of the world. Why? I'm a sinner. Despite whatever our circumstances are, we can look back and see that God mercifully chose to love us.

[12:13] Unlovable us. Unlovable us. Unlovable us. It's not where we normally go for help in a situation where we maybe feel like we're not being loved and we look at how our life is going.

But God's word does, doesn't it? God's word does. Maybe God is onto something there. Where do you need to know God's merciful, electing love for you right now?

Where would that be a really helpful truth to know in your life? Mercifully chosen. If you're still doubting God's love though, we can not only look back, but we can look forward.

We've been mercifully spared. Mercifully spared. Basically, look at what you could have got. You should get judgment.

You should get judgment, but you won't. Look down at your Bibles, verse 3. Have a look at verse 3. I have loved Jacob, verse 3, but Esau I have hated.

[13:25] And I have turned his hill country into wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals. You want to know God's love, Israel? You want to know my love, Israel? Look at your brother.

Look at how he's treated. That should be you. That should be you. It hasn't got well for him, has it? I've not done an exodus for him.

I've not fought his battles for him. I've not promised him an inheritance. I mean, his inheritance is landfills. Verse 4. Edom, that's the nation that come from Esau, like Israel came from Jacob.

Edom may say, verse 4, though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins. But this is what the Lord Almighty says. They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the wicked land of people, always under the wrath of the Lord.

Recently, I was chatting to one of my friends about teaching Malachi. And he said he had to do a children's talk on this passage, which I don't envy him at all, because doing a children's talk on this passage is a tough gig.

[14:33] And he said, well, he asked two kids to kind of sit either side of him and build a Lego tower, right? And do you know what he did? On this side, probably younger, probably slightly struggle with building Lego towers.

Every time he struggled, he helped him build it. And then on this side, maybe someone a bit older, and he was building the Lego tower. But every time he'd make them headway, knock it over.

Kind of, what's going on here? I'm not sure I'll do that in a children's talk, actually. But you get the picture. Israel rebuilt their temple. They did rebuild it.

What happens when Edom tries that? Verse 4, they may rebuild, but I will demolish. God kicks it over.

They will be called the wicked lands, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. Again, Edom and Israel are no different.

[15:34] They're both wicked. But Edom have God against them, but Israel don't. Edom have God's wrath always over them, but Israel don't. Do you remember that awful plane crash last year in India?

Everyone sadly died. Apart from one. Apart from one. Now, put yourself in his shoes as he walks away from that wreckage, and he sees all those poor people.

He must have felt, that could have been me. That could have been me. Put yourself in Israel's shoes as they look over the border at their brother.

Wow, I am really blessed. I'm not facing judgment. I haven't got the wrath of the Lord over me. And they should think, not that could have been me, but that should have been me.

That should have been me. That's exactly what they deserve. They're lovingly spared, aren't they? Same for us.

[16:41] It's not an easy truth. But God says, look at your brother. Look at your neighbour. Look over your shoulder at the billions of people who will one day deservedly face God's judgment in hell, but who you are no better than.

And then look at the position you are in. No condemnation in Christ Jesus is what defines you. And then say, wow, that should not be me.

That should be me. Again, I would have put it like this, but God mercifully setting his love on us is not like he's randomly picking loads of people who are drowning in a swimming pool and he just randomly picks people.

We're all raiding the king's castle, vying for blood, wanting the king dead, who gave us everything. Every single one of us deserves the death penalty from God for cosmic treason.

But God in his pure mercy, as we're trying to get rid of him, shows guilty prisoners like us mercy. We're mercifully spared from what we deserve, aren't we?

[18:07] But I think it cuts even deeper for us, more than people in Malachi's day, because we don't just look over at our brother Esau or humanity. We look over at another brother, a brother who actually deserved God's love, who never put a foot wrong, who should never, ever have faced judgment, a brother who we can look at, hanging on a tree, who willingly takes the judgment we deserve, who willingly experiences what it's like for a human being to be under the wrath of the Lord.

And we can look at the Lord Jesus and we can say, that should have been me. That should have been me hanging on that cross.

That should have been me hanging there. That should have been me taking the worst punishment of all. And we look at that brother and we say, what mercy, what love.

That's not just humbling. That's quite moving, isn't it? When we think we're not loved and we know the Lord Jesus, I think we've forgotten just what God has done for us.

Just what God has done for us. I think we need to know how loved we are, don't we? Because like the people of Malachi's day, we might get to a point of saying, you know, after taking the plunge loads of times, look at my circumstances.

[20:00] You don't love me. You don't care about me. Maybe you're there today. I was thinking, actually, we might need to take the plunge as a church soon, a whole church.

Well, we mentioned this before. We're working towards a church plant. It's not happening imminently, this church plant, but medium term. But if it happens, maybe, well, you know, even though it's objectively amazing to plant churches, okay, we're all going to be taking the plunge if we stay or if we go.

And things might not go perfectly. It might be hard. It might be a sacrifice. It might not even work. We'll lose brothers and sisters who leave to go.

How are we going to react to that when that happens? Now, we did a big thing for you and I thought you were there for us. You loved us. And we sent people away, but we're still struggling.

Are you sticking with us? We need to be prepared for the future when we might get put through the wringer. And we need to know now when we've taken the plunge, when we've taken that big wish, when you've prayed for years, when you've given and it's been so costly, when you've not really got better, when you're not seeing the fruit you wanted after years of serving in that ministry.

[21:29] You need to know that your circumstances don't mean you're not loved. I don't know about you, but it's so easy to fall into that trap, isn't it?

You know, what we see and feel kind of equals like how much God has committed to me or how much he cares about me. And God so often does go way over the top and blesses us in really surprising, amazing ways.

And we should thank him for that when that happens. And we do every day because he's so kind and loving. When you think about it, our circumstances aren't actually the best metric for figuring out if God loves us.

They're not the best metric for figuring out if God loves us. We live in a fallen world. We're not promised heaven before heaven. The biggest challenge for me, I think, has been to change where I

look.

You know, it's not always my knee-jerk reaction to think about God's electing past merciful love and the future of where I'm not going to be judged.

[ 22 : 36 ] I don't always think like that in a situation where it's not going right for me, but it should be. When we look to those places where they all kind of centre on Jesus and what he did on the cross, think about this, right?

Even if we lose everything and everything goes wrong, we are so loved, aren't we? we are so loved and we look back and we look forward.

God is so merciful to us. Let me pray. Lord, we're really sorry when we look down at our situations and we make a judgement about who you are from them.

And we're really sorry when we maybe get cynical and we don't think that you love us. We think that you've abandoned us. It will help us to be convinced, help us in those times where it's hard to be reminded of how much you've loved us in the past, how we are chosen, even though we don't deserve it.

Thank you so much that we are spared. Thank you so much for the Lord Jesus. Thank you for what he did on that cross. Thank you. That should have been us but he took it for us.

[ 24 : 11 ] And we pray this in his name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.