

Reality Check

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[0 : 00] Just to lead in what I'm talking about today. I'm talking about a reality check.

Getting a reality check. A spiritual reality check. And this week I had occasion to meet with a man who made a confession. He made confession.

Now you know we don't have a confessional room. In our church. Not in the new building either.

And you don't have to make a confession to a man, to me, to a priest certainly.

We're all priests. But certainly there's no cause for confession to a man as a practice, as it were, as a ritual. But the Bible does say this. Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed.

Confess your faults, it says, one to another and pray one for another. Now this man, he had a startling confession to make. Now when people have a meeting with the pastor or when they're around fellow Christians, often they can use all the right language and make out that they are so spiritual.

[1 : 16] And that they have their life with God going just fine. Just fine and dandy. But this man was different. He had the guts and the honesty to say that he felt like he wasn't where he should be spiritually.

He showed the humility and the courage. He didn't make any excuses for where he was at. He didn't try to justify himself. And after I had met with this man and I walked away, I felt provoked too. It provoked me. It provoked me too to think about where am I at spiritually. It was a reality check for me.

To think about my own walk, my own standing with God. Do I love the Lord my God with all my heart, my soul, my strength? Where am I at spiritually? It was like a full on reality check.

A reality check. Sometimes we can make all kinds of excuses, can't we? Oh, I'm busy on this or that. I've got things to do and then I'll get around to this or that with God.

[2 : 23] But the reality is, it's getting right now. It's getting it sorted now. Maybe I should have told this man I needed a reality check too.

I should have told him more of my own faults and my own weakness and my own inadequacy, my own frailty of how I want more of God in my own life.

And I'm not where I should be, where I know I need to be. I want to walk closer with my God. I want to be closer to the Lord. And when we really face up to it, brothers and sisters, we all should have that heart, shouldn't we?

To really honestly be honest before God. Maybe we all need, as it were, a reality check. Where am I spiritually? And where ought I to be? Where can I be?

God's grace helping me to be, to be in the will of God, more in the will of God than I am now. And maybe it's having that honest to God evaluation of where we are at spiritually.

[3 : 23] I challenge you today to think of this. You know, I asked a loved one one time, how are you going spiritually? And bam! It was like an explosion.

There was a reaction. It hit a nerve. It hit the cord here. It hit a nerve. I got this reaction. Like, boom! A reaction I didn't expect.

And sometimes people can get like that, can't they? Where are you at spiritually? Oh! How dare you say that about me? You know? Oh! How dare you? How, how, why point the finger at me?

Or they might get so defensive or they might pass the buck or pass the blame or try to scoot scoot around these shoes or just plain get angry that anyone should give a word of loving challenge or show some genuine interest in their soul.

In that part of our lives, it is the most essential part. The very core of us, the being, the soul, the state of our soul. And it is an important question for all of us.

[4 : 25] How am I going spiritually? How is my relationship with God? God, am I where it ought to be? Is my relationship with God strong?

Am I where I should be? Sometimes a reality check comes when we're confronted. Like David was. He had committed adultery. He'd engineered a murder.

And the prophet came to David and eyeballed him and challenged him. He told a story of a man dealt unjustly.

And David said he should be slain. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. You're the man I'm talking about, David.

You're the man not right with God. You're the man who needs to get sorted with God. You have sinned and you need to get right with God. And sometimes it's that time we're in outright sin and disobedience before God.

[5 : 26] And Nathan comes and says, your name, thou art the man. And it could take many long wasted years.

Years that the locust has eaten. Years of wandering and backsliding. Before the Lord shakes us. And wakes us up from our spiritual slumber. And gets us on track again.

Gets us in accord with him again. Sometimes it can be deliberate. That we get too distracted. We don't care to stop and think about spiritual things.

And we're unaware of our state before the Lord. We think, oh, I'm going just fine. I'm all right, Jack. She'll be right, mate. But we've let things slip and we don't even realise it.

You know, thank God to have a heart like that honest man that said, I'm not where I should be. Sometimes people just bluff and pretend that they are where they should be.

[6 : 30] Or they're like Samson. They've let things slip. Yet they've missed God's best. Like Samson. He was strong and mighty.

He'd known many great victories, many past victories. And he acted like nothing could stop him. He was invincible. Bulletproof. Maybe he got proud.

Too self-centred. But little by little he lost his communion with God. And the Lord had departed from him. And Samson didn't seem to realise that truly, the truly sad spiritual state that he was in.

Judges 16 from verse 20. And here was Samson lying in the lap of Delilah. It was warm and cosy and cuddly.

And finally she got him to tell what the source of his strength was. It was his hair which was reflective of his commitment to the Lord, of a life committed to God's service.

[7 : 42] And that sign of his spiritual dedication, he confessed to Delilah that that was the source of his strength. And while he was there having his little, sound asleep.

Not a care in the world. Snip, snip, snip. Snip, snip, snip. Snip, snip, snip. And he woke out of his sleep and said, as Delilah said, the Philistines be upon thee, Samson.

And he said, I will go out as other times before and shake myself. And he wished not. He didn't know that the Lord was departed from him.

You know, a shallowness can creep in. Brother, sister, a superficiality, a carelessness. The Lord had to deeply work in Samson's life to shake him from his complacency.

We know he suffered much after that day. As he was bound and his eyes gouged out. And then sent to the mill to grind.

[8 : 46] But God honoured him at the end. But brother, sister, let's not get to that place that Samson got. The Lord's departed and you don't even know.

You don't even know God's left you, as it were. He's left your heart. Let's have that tenderness of a son with a father. And we see sometimes it means chastening.

In Hebrews 12, the context here, the writer says, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth. And scourget every son whom he receiveth. If you're God's son, God's daughter, sometimes he will discipline with love.

He will provoke, he will challenge, he will confront, he will address things with you. Just as you're an earthly father, you have to be accountable.

[9 : 56] And it's God's love that he shows when he chastens us. Sometimes we can even be with such strong religious zeal, but misdirected, like Saul before his conversion in Acts 22, as one account of his testimony of life.

As we know, here was Saul of Tarsus, and he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel. This is from Acts 22, verse 3. He had everything just right. He had all the right training, all the right doctrine as such.

And yet he persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons, both men and women. And then he had letters from Damascus. Letters, rather, that were sending him to Damascus.

The high priest had authorised him to kill Christians. He was legally doing his job.

And zealously, he had a zeal that was misguided. And then the great light round about him shone on that road to Damascus. And I heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

[11:06] And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which thou are appointed for thee to do.

Saul was a man on a mission. He was bent on this religious mission. He was intent on killing Christians and destroying the church at Damascus.

But God arrested him there on the road, on Damascus Road, and gave him a new mission. He was radically saved, transformed, and received a new commission on God's call.

You know, some may go through religious motions. They might be very zealous for their religion. Whether it be a cultural, historical, you know, oh, the family's kind of church, what I always used to do, and the family kind of religion.

And they're not saved. How sad to be a churchgoer and lost, damned. God has to do a deep work within to save a soul.

[12:19] Sometimes a whole church needs a reality check. The Lord had tried them and found them wanting, like the church at Laodicea. The church at Laodicea. The church that makes God sick.

The church at Laodicea. Revelation 3 tells us of this church. And the Lord says to the angel, write these things.

This is what the faithful and true witness is saying. I know thy works. They are neither cold nor hot. I would thou work cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods and of need of nothing.

And knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. He was a church that thought we've got everything that there is to get.

[13:22] We've got it all right. We've got the technology right. We've got everything right. We've got all the bells and whistles.

But God saw deeper than what people could see. He could see the spiritual condition. It wasn't right. Wretched. Wretched. Miserable.

Poor. Blind and naked. What a reality check the Laodiceans had. Sometimes we need that, don't we? To shake us out of where we are at.

And to challenge us to move forward with God. The church at Ephesus had a light problem. This was an assembly praised for many good things.

Yet it missed something vital. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee. Because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.

[14:24] And repent and do the first works. Else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Now we've seen churches where the candlestick has been removed. As it were, the witness, the light of that church has dwindled and flickered and flickered out.

God can close a church. And Ephesus had left their first love. Brother, sister, let's not get to that coldness of heart before God.

Right through the Old Testament we see the very human faces, the human side of the leaders and kings. Many failed. We see the rise and fall of many kings.

Many leaders. Jacob, he manipulated and schemed. He was quite off track. Yet for all his faults, God raised him up for his own glory. We see King Asa in 2 Chronicles 14.

[15:29] Asa did that which was right, that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. For he took away the altars of the strange gods in the high places and break down the images and cut down the groves.

He started well. He made many godly reforms. But in the 36th year of his reign, rather than relying on the Lord, he took the silver and gold from the temple.

He hired a foreign king to fight against his enemies. And then the godly prophet confronted him. He became angry and threw the prophet into prison. If only he'd made a reality check.

If only he'd saw his errors and received correction. Yet sadly, he sought not the Lord. It tells of him, he had disease in his feet until his disease was exceeding great.

Yet in his disease, he sought not the Lord. He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. God was trying to get his attention, but he sought not the Lord.

[16:28] When God's trying to get your attention, he wants you to seek after him with all your heart. Another king, the godly king, Jehoshaphat, made many reforms, but later he allied himself with wicked Ahab and his evil son Ahaziah.

Jehoshaphat had some good record, but he allied himself, he joined himself with Ahaziah king of Israel who did very wickedly.

Warts and all is the Bible, isn't it? We see the blessing and we see the cursing. We see the sensitivity and softness to God and then we see the hardness of heart towards God.

We see people searching and growing and learning and obeying and then we see them failing and falling and faulty.

Warts and all, isn't it? And King Jehoshaphat had to have that reality check. If only he had seen his fault, but no, he joined in an ungodly company and he was misled.

[17:41] Friends, let's watch our alliances, who we line up with, who we spend time with, can influence us in an ungodly way.

Another king, King Jehoshaphat began by repairing the house of the Lord and bringing good reforms, but later he abandoned the Lord and he served idols.

And he murdered the son of the man who had raised him as a young king. This is Joash. And it tells how in 2 Chronicles 24 from verse 18, it tells how they left the house of the Lord their God and served groves and idols.

They went and served idols. This was a God believing people. They went and served idols. God sent prophets to them, but they would not give ear. That's 2 Chronicles 24, 19.

They would not give ear. And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, the priest. He said, I'm skipping bits here, but why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord?

[18:51] You have forsaken the Lord. He also hath forsaken you. And so they conspired against him. They stoned him with stones. And then they slew him.

And that's what the prophet can expect to get. He left the reverence of God and he chased after idols. Friends, I'm making these points and I kind of ran out of time to get more slides here.

But if only he had heeded the reality check. And what about us here today, this morning? Have we got that intent of heart to follow after God, to seek after him?

King Hezekiah was another king. He restored the worship, but later he followed the Babylonians in their ways.

This is 2 Kings 20. From verse 16 to 18, it says, your sons are going to be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

[19:57] God's telling this man, Hezekiah, your sons are going to be slaves of the king of Babylon. When we get out of accord with God, there's consequences.

Isaiah gave him warning. Will we heed the warning? Or will we shut out that still small voice, that nagging feeling, I've got to get right with God.

I'm not where I should be. That nagging feeling, my relationship with God is not what it should be.

And that's the beginning, isn't it? Some people aren't even at that point.

Because they think, I'm fine. I come to church every once in a while or every Sunday even. Or more. You might be morning, night, mid-week and still be out of the right place that God wants you to be.

And this is not to condemn, this is to challenge. Now you might want to pick up stones and throw them at me like they did at Hezekiah. Sorry, at Isaiah.

[21:08] Matthew 23, our Lord soundly rebukes the Pharisees who trusted in their religious works. But they heeded not the rebuke. If only they'd heeded that reality check, as it were.

But they were too proud to see things as they really were. They were just whited sepulchres full of dead men's bones. Looking for a mote in someone else's eye.

Some little speck. Oh! You there! You've got a speck in your eye. You! You! Not seeing the beam, the log poking out of their own eye.

Blind to their own spiritual need. The Lord gave another illustration of hardness of heart when he tells in Luke 18, two men went to the temple and prayed.

He was telling those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee, the other a publican.

[22 : 04] The Pharisee blabbed on about this, that and the other. Oh, thank you. I'm not like that guy. Ha! I'm just here and he's...

And the publican standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven. He just looked at his feet, as it were.

And he smote upon his breast saying, God, God, God, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Amen. That was his cry. A cry, a prayer from his heart. And the Lord Jesus says, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that humbled himself shall be exalted.

Friends, we need humility of heart. Joseph was seemingly boastful in his earlier days.

[23 : 09] The Lord had to teach him humility. The record of his life seems like one reality check after another. Naomi lost her husband and two sons.

She had feelings of emptiness and bitterness and loss. But she helped instruct her daughter-in-law, Ruth, in who to marry. She wouldn't let adversity get in the way of her seeking after God and his will.

The reality checks of the hurts and losses of our life can be great teachers. Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho. Yet Rahab came to know God, called to be a saint, sanctified, listed in the Hebrews 11 chapter.

Yet Rahab came from where she was to know God. And she braved great danger to stand on the Lord's side, hiding the two spies, confessing faith in the Saviour.

And the Lord showed her grace and mercy. The reality check for her was, I'm going to stop my sin and I'm going to trust in my God. I know my need of him.

[24 : 15] I know my lack, my loss, my neglect. God can work in the most surprising of people, can't he? As he did in Rahab's life, he can work in ours and do great things.

As Rahab preserved the lineage of our Lord and Saviour, the Lord Jesus. God was pleased with Rahab to use this unworthy vessel and to transform her life into one redeemed, chosen, blessed, used for the glory of God.

Saved. Sometimes our biggest obstacle is the ego, isn't it? When we might bluff our way, oh yeah, I'm going good with God.

Yeah, I'm really spiritual. I'm just a super Christian. You know? Sometimes our spiritual condition, that ego gets in the way and we don't realise, really, we're all in the same boat, aren't we?

John argued with the other disciples who would be the greatest. The Lord had to show John where the true humility was, not in mastering others, but in serving.

[25 : 27] Lot was a man who chose the pathway of ease and self-comfort and he aligned himself to keep company with the wrong crowd. God, by an angel, had to drag him out by the hand.

That was a reality check for Lot. God has different ways to get our attention, doesn't he?

Sometimes it could be tragedy, hurt, sad times.

Maybe just, we just get to the end of ourselves and our own strength. To wake us up to where we are spiritually. Are we willing to heed his call, to follow his leading?

Thankfully, God can and still does use fallible vessels because that's all he's got, isn't it? Weak and fallible vessels to show his grace and advance his kingdom.

King Solomon, another example, had extraordinary wisdom and brought great blessing to Israel, but he allowed his many wives to turn his heart to idolatry.

[26 : 27] It says in 1 Kings 11, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

How sad to start well, and yet for the closing days of our life to be wasted and a reproach. What a tragic closing chapter of Solomon's life.

When a reality check comes, we can heed or we can close our ears. We can heed or we can continue to rebel and suffer loss.

So, friends, just to come to the application, as it were, what does it mean for me? The good news is that the Bible is full of faulty people.

Faulty, failing, warts and all, real people, imperfect people. Yet in those humble hearts, God can have his sway. He can have his way.

[27 : 24] His grace can prevail and sustain. And even when we come to that weakness of our flesh, of our mind, of our own strength, where we feel like we just can't go on anymore, we can think of Elijah.

Elijah, he knew the greatness of God, the great wonders and signs. Yet Elijah had human weakness. He had a breakdown, you could say.

You'd think he'd have unshakable faith. Elijah, the great prophet, saw God move to stop the rain for three years, to feed the rain, to be fed by ravens, to see the unlimited supply from the container of oil and flour, to witness a widow's son resurrected, and to see the prophets of Baal consumed with fire from heaven.

But when the showdown came with Baal worshippers, so angered King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, and she vowed to see him dead, Elijah couldn't take it anymore. He became fearful and he fled into the wilderness.

He was very human, I put to you. Elijah! Prophet of God! Human. Weak. Undone. Felt like he was the only prophet left.

[28 : 45] I'm all on my lonesome. I'm the only one here. And God responded to Elijah with that still, small voice. He fed Elijah.

He allowed him to rest. He listened to Elijah's complaints. He encouraged him. He lifted him up. He was like a reality check to get back to work for God.

Get back to what God has given you to do. What about us? Are we just bluffing? Is our Christianity shallow and weak? And we don't even know? We don't even know it is.

Maybe we don't even care it is. Maybe there's other loves that take his love. I'm talking to myself. We haven't stopped and looked hard enough deep down within and think, God, I'm not where I should be.

If we honestly, honestly, honestly admitted it to God. If we're honestly humble enough to say it, honest enough to admit it, to stop bluffing, pretending we're where we should be when we're not.

[29 : 59] We're going through the motions, saying the right things, yet missing the point. What a shame that would be. Rather say, brother, pray for me. I'm not where I should be with God. Sister, pray for me.

What a sad state of affairs it would be to miss that, God's best for us. And that it would be just lip service.

Just, ah, I'm just going through the motions. I've sung my four songs and I've heard the preacher and now I'm right for another six and a half days, till the next time we get together.

Missing the point such that it just becomes lip service. Matthew 15, our Lord says, this people draws near to me with their lips, with their mouth. They honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

For some they will say, they will do this and that, but they are no shows. You know, I often get this, I had it happen quite a bit really and it's quite amusing.

[31 : 04] I almost chuckle to myself when they say, pastor, we'll see you next Sunday. Yeah, I'll be in church next Sunday. I think, okay, we'll see.

They say they're going to be there, but they don't show up. They can't even get there, let alone do anything else. They say, see you next church service, but they don't attend.

It's a bit like Matthew 21, 28, where a certain man had two sons and he came to the first and said, son, go work today in my vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not.

But afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second and said, likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir. And went not.

It'd be better to be like the first, wouldn't it? Say, oh, look, I can't get to that meeting. And you maybe surprise them and turn up. Rather than say, yes, I'll be there.

[32 : 02] You can count on me. Yes, sir. I go, sir. And went not. And the good news is that the one who said he was unable did show up. The Lord works on us and turns us around, doesn't he?

Because it's the one who says, I'm weak. I can't make it. I've got this and that going on. They admit they're inadequate. I lack the ability. They don't hide their failings.

He is the one God chooses to use. Because he's honest. He's honest to God. Oughtn't we be such a people?

Be honest. Be real. Take the masks off. And open your heart to him. John Mark was one who even quit.

He quit. He said, I'm tossing the towel in. Oh, I'm going to take my, what did they say? I'll take my bag and go home kind of thing. Oh, I've had enough. He was halfway through this mission trip.

[33 : 00] This is Acts 13. I'm maybe ad-libbing a bit over much here. But the point is, in Acts 13, 13, it says, John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem.

Here he was. He was one of them. He was on the team. He was one of the ministry team. He was one of the servants of God. And he said, I'm departing. I've got to go back home.

I've got to go back to Jerusalem. I've had enough of this. People would have given up on John, John Mark. Paul seemed to think John Mark was a lost cause. Oh, don't talk to me about him.

I'm being a bit ad-lib here, but we don't know why John had abandoned them on this trip. But it was dishonorable. It wasn't planned. He jumped ship.

He left the mission part way through. And when Barnabas later suggested to Paul, hey, let's get John Mark. Mark, let's go and get John Mark. Paul said, no. And there was this major disagreement between these two mighty men of God, Paul and Barnabas, such that they separated.

[34 : 07] It was a church split. These two men had been on multiple mission trips together. They became so divided over young John Mark, they no longer work together.

Yet many years later, Paul is sitting in prison, awaiting trial, writing to the Colossians. He not only told them that John Mark is with him, but that he has been a great comfort.

He also told them, welcome, John Mark, if he comes. This young man, he had sorely disappointed Paul. He'd let them down big time. Yet he had become a man who brought Paul comfort.

At one time, John Mark was a personality who caused division in the body. But now, Paul called him a fellow worker. Colossians 4.

It's about being humble enough, being real enough to confess our lack, our need of more of our Lord, and that he have more of us.

[35 : 10] It's coming to that lowly place where we don't big note ourselves or be a brash show off. Oh, I'm spiritually just right up here. I'm so spiritual.

When really, I've got a long way to go. A long, long way. That's me. That's me. When we get that Holy Ghost reality check.

A turning point. A drawing of a line in the sand. Don't let your feelings of inadequacy, your consciousness of your faults, stop you from serving.

It's all the more reason God can use you. Isn't it? When you come to that place, Moses was called the most humble man on the face of the earth. Numbers 12, 13. But he had a very serious problem with his temper.

He was fallible. He kept losing it. Losing his cool. He was humble and weak. He felt he couldn't speak. He was not able. Moses. Why would God choose Moses of all people?

[36 : 10] God used him despite him. Despite his obvious failings. And the point is, when you get to that kind of spiritual reality check in your walk with God, when God gets your attention and you're honest enough to say, I lay my all on the altar.

I'm at your disposal, God. When you're honest enough to admit your fault, to humble yourself before and then, you can become clay in the potter's hands.

Clay. Not solid pottery, but clay that he can shape and make and bless. Some will get a reality check, but they'll be like the rich young brewer.

The Lord challenged him. Get rid of it all. Follow me. And he walked away. He walked away. Too costly. Too costly for him.

Yet he lost eternal reward because of his other loves. When you get the reality check, you can go this way or that way. King Hezekiah was confronted with death.

[37 : 20] Sometimes it can be a reality check. When a loved one dies and you think, my life is finite in this flesh. When a loved one dies and you realise I am mortal.

I've only got so much time and I don't know how much time that is. And the prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah he was facing death. This is Isaiah 38.

And the prophet says unto him, Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face towards the wall and prayed unto the Lord.

He says, remember me. Remember me now, O Lord. I beseech thee. Hezekiah wept sore. And then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah saying, Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the

God of David thy father, I have seen thy tears.

Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. Wow, that's a good pair, isn't it? You're on your deathbed. The doctors say, look, your time's up. Fifteen more years, Lord.

[38 : 31] Just need a bit more time to do more with my life. And the Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer. It was a reality check. You're going to die. Get right with God. Set thine house in order.

The Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer. Have that heart's cry like he did. There's so many more we could talk about. Nicodemus had a reality check in John 3.

He had all this religious training. He had all the knowledge. He had the degrees and certificates on the wall. He had his doctor of divinity. You know, his bachelor of theology. You name it. He had all the religious training.

He had all the knowledge. But he missed this core fundamental. John 3 verse 9. He says, how can these things be? Talking about thou must be born again.

You must be born again. And Jesus answered and said unto him, art thou a master of Israel? And knowest not these things? We can know so much and yet miss the point.

[39 : 29] We can know about religious things. Harking back to Peter's word. You must be born again. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And thou shalt be saved. We can have religion.

We can have knowledge. We can have wisdom as the world would reckon or philosophy. And miss the point. You must be born again. That's a reality check, isn't it?

In other words, you must have a spiritual birth on the inside. That God makes you brand new. A brand new heart. A brand new start. A brand new life. Born again. That's the beginning of a new life. When you trust him. When you confess Christ as your Lord and Saviour. He died on the cross. He rose as the almighty God and Saviour of this planet. If you'll trust him, he can be your God and Saviour.

Will you let God have all of you? Friends, just to wrap up. We are tools in the hand of God. There was a man called Samuel Brangle. He was an early Salvation Army preacher.

[40 : 31] And he was introduced one time at one occasion as the great Dr. Brangle. And he later wrote in his diaries, If I appear great in their eyes, Lord.

If I appear great in their eyes, the Lord is most graciously helping me to see how absolutely nothing I am without him. And helping me to keep little in my own eyes.

He does use me. But I am so concerned that he uses me and that it is not of me the work is done.

The axe cannot boast of the trees that is cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman.

He made it. He sharpened it. And he used it. The moment he throws it aside, it becomes only old iron. Oh, that I may never lose sight of this. It's not of me.

When we get that reality check, we are just at his disposal. We realize our great lack, our great need of him. We don't try to bluff it that we're a super-duper Christian.

[41 : 38] We say, I need more of God. I need to be where he wants me to be. I need to heed him and get things on track spiritually. And we will see we have to get back to work.

You know, my friend who was honest enough to me to tell of his feeling of not measuring up, his sense of not being in the place with God that he knew he should be, provoked a reality check in me, in me, in my own life, in my relationship with God.

I'm not where I should be. True character is about seeing that, isn't it? Where we are at, we're in need of grace.

And moving forward, thank God, he uses messed up and weak people. We've got to be weak enough for him to use us. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. For the many Bible characters we've heard about here, recollected now. Lord, we think of some who've started well and ended not so well.

[42 : 55] We see others that you turned their lives around and started them on the track. Lord, we're all in different places, in different parts of our journeys, Lord, in spiritual things.

We pray, most of all, that each one here would know that heartfelt certainty of a home in heaven, by calling on your name as Saviour and Lord, and trusting you to save us.

And Lord, then, that that walk will continue in strength and power, not of our own doing, but despite our weakness and frailty, Lord, that you can work in every heart so that it won't be, it won't be, we'll ever say, it's of me, but we'll always say, it's of you.

It's of you. It's of you, Lord. It's of you, Lord.