

Real Lives with Kristian Dimond

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Preacher: Roger Carswell/Kristian Dimond

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Just to give you an idea of where we're headed this evening, in just a few moments I'll hand over to Roger Carswell, who is our guest interviewer and speaker this week. And he in turn will introduce us to Christian Diamond, who's our guest interviewee.

They'll chat together for half an hour or so exploring Christian's life and the impact that Jesus has made. And then Roger will help us think about that a little more from the Bible. It may be that that flags up some questions.

We'd love to hear from you if that's the case. Please do get in touch at the end of the evening. We'll share an email address so that you can do exactly that. And we can direct your questions to whoever's most helpful to address that, be that Christian, Roger or perhaps someone from Grace Church Dulwich.

We're keen to keep our time together to just an hour. So we'll wrap up at nine o'clock. So let's get cracking. Christian and Roger, we're thrilled to have you with us. Over to you. Thank you very much. Let me unmute.

[1 : 25] Yes, Warren, I can see you eating there. I quite envy you. But anyway, it's great to see you all. But I've not yet seen Christian. I hope he's there, is he? And I've never met Christian in my life before, but let's see if I can find him.

Are you there? I am. Oh, there you are. OK, Pastor Christian D. Wonderful to see you. Thank you very much. Now, look, I was supposed to interview you a week or two ago, wasn't I? But then, unfortunately, we had builders who, because of snow, a week at a job that was going to take, they said, 10 days just took over.

Well, it took four and a bit weeks. They kept failing to get here because of snow. And there was so much noise next door. Somebody else interviewed. But Christian, it's great to meet you. I'm just going to be nosy, if you don't mind, and find out as much as I can.

And we'll all eavesdrop in. But tell us a bit about your background. We know you're a footballer. I'll find out a little bit about that in a few moments. But tell us about your background. Tell us about your home.

What was it like? Yeah, so I grew up in Barry, near Cardiff, in South Wales. And I had quite a varied childhood, I would say.

[2 : 34] I enjoyed school, enjoyed sports. Home life was a bit of a mixed bag. My dad had his struggles. So there was a bit of violence in the home, unfortunately.

And lots of things that were pretty challenging. But I thought that was normal growing up. And I thought I'm no worse off than a lot of my mates.

And I just kind of got on with it, really. But it was certainly outside of the home, either in school or playing sport, that I felt safe and free.

When you say violence, was that violence directed towards you or towards your mother? Or where was it seen? Yeah, mostly towards my mum. It was towards...

But you witnessed it, did you? Yeah. Yeah. So if I wasn't a victim of it, which I was now and again, but not as much as my mum. But that didn't bother me.

[3 : 37] Taking a beating as a kid, it didn't really affect me that much. It was being powerless when my mum took a beating. That was the difficulty.

And that feeling of guilt that I should have done more. I could have done more. Did you have brothers and sisters? Yeah, two younger brothers. So thankfully, my youngest brother wasn't around at the time.

My mum and dad divorced just after having him. So he doesn't have any memory of this, thankfully. But my younger brother, James, he's three years younger than me. And yeah, he remembers it vividly.

Christian, was there any sort of, I don't know, religious belief as far as your family were concerned? Did you ever go to church? Were you taught to pray or anything like that? No, never. The only time we went to church was a family christening or funeral or wedding.

So there was no real mention of God in the household. So you kind of met you as a... Go on, yes, sorry. Yeah, I did wonder as a child, you know, could there be perhaps?

[4 : 44] But as I got older, I just thought, no, it is not. So if I'd met you as a teenager, 13, 14, 15 year old and said, Christian, do you believe in God? What would you have said?

No. Yeah. Not at all. And school, you said you enjoyed school. Those two words never went together in my mind, enjoying school. But that's a different subject. So was school safe for you? Initially, yes. I did go through some difficult periods in school. I was bullied for a time. And I never really, I didn't fit neatly in to a group.

I kind of got pushed ahead. So I did a year ahead in school. So everyone was older than me in my year. So I did quite well academically. But most of my friends were very sporty.

And most of my sporty friends were not that great in school academically. And so I was in the classroom. I'd spend most of my time with, sorry for this stereotype, but with the more kind of geeky kids.

[5 : 48] But then outside of the classroom, I was with my sporty mates. So it was a bit awkward. But better than being home, that was for sure. And so you say you were sporty.

You know, we're going to discover that you've got the sort of, you had the job that most boys would dream of having. But at what age did it become apparent that, yeah, you're not bad at football? I think the realisation hit me when I was about 12. And I started playing for Swansea City. And I was playing with lads who were...

Oh, wow. That's pretty good. Yeah. Yeah. And that's pretty good to be playing for Swansea City at 12. Yeah. And I was playing with the lads who were a lot older than me. And I just thought, I'm so lucky to be here.

I kept saying it to my dad when he would take me to games or my mum when she'd take me. I can't believe I'm here. I can't believe I'm playing for a professional football team. They were not a big team. They were in the second division at the time.

[6 : 47] But to me, that was huge. And I thought, I'm OK. I'm not bad. And I would imagine at that age, you start to, I don't know, have a bit of adulation at school as well.

Yeah, that did bring its privileges and problems. So that's kind of when the bullying started, actually. There was quite a bit of jealousy from a few other people.

And I ended up getting into a few scraps at school, which wasn't ideal. Ah, OK. Right. So it's quite a mixed background.

When were you spotted? When did somebody of significance think, oh, wow, this guy's got potential? I was 13 and a scout from Crystal Palace was watching me play.

And he wanted to whisk me and my parents off to London and invited me to play a match against Arsenal for the youth team.

[7 : 51] And I was overwhelmed, really, because you got to wear the real kit. And he took us to the stadium afterwards and we got to meet all the first team players. And there were people that I was watching on the television and they were there, stood next to me.

And it was all very exciting. And then when they said, we want to sign you on this big, long contract and you'll leave home within a year or two. And we'll pay for you to stay here and we'll pay for this and we'll pay for that.

I thought it was a dream, really. I thought this is crazy. But it all happened. Incredible. And so you were to leave Wales then to go to London.

Yeah. 15 years old. I left home. My mum was scared for two reasons, really. She was losing her firstborn son, leaving home at a much younger age than she'd anticipated.

But also the fear was there that I was no longer around to interject when my dad got angry and violent. I'd learned over the years how to control him a little bit with my words and calm him down.

[9 : 04] And she knew with me out of the picture, it was going to be, well, pretty dangerous. So she made the decision to leave just a couple of weeks after I left home so that they divorced at that

time.

So life in Wales was pretty chaotic and my life in London was I was living the high life. It was whole rocks. I don't know the legalities of sport, but was an English team permitted to come to a Welsh area and, I don't know, spot somebody from Wales and take them out of Wales?

No. They were not supposed to do that. No. Yeah, that was a bit naughty. They were supposed to wait until I was 14. But Crystal Palace knew that as soon as I turned 14, the English clubs then would come in and then I would go and visit them.

And then I would decide which of them I would want to sign for. So they cheekily got in there before those other clubs. And I actually signed for Crystal Palace on my 14th birthday.

So when those other clubs approached, I had to tell them, oh, I've already signed. I've already committed. And were you on a quarter of a million pounds a week at that stage?

[10:20] Sadly not. No. Not yet, anyway. No, far from it. I think they paid me a hundred pound a week to go to school, which is really cool when you go to school and you're getting paid to go to school.

But no, not a quarter of a million a week. So just talk us through your sort of professional career as a footballer because it's ups and downs, isn't it?

But talk us through it. Yeah, I think probably the highest, the greatest up was when I was 16, 17. I'd been fortunate enough to play for Wales and travel the world playing for Wales and had a fair bit of success doing that.

And then playing for Crystal Palace as well. We had an extremely good youth team. And the first team manager at Crystal Palace at the time, Steve Koppel, he had me training with the first team.

I was smaller and weaker than everybody else. I knew that. But in terms of the kind of speed of thought and speed of play, I thought, OK, I'm not a million miles away.

[11:25] I felt like a boy in a man's world. But I thought, this is going OK. And I remember coming back from a tournament in Italy and Steve Koppel said, a couple of teams are in for you.

Inter Milan are trying to sign you and there's others as well. And your agent will be trying to convince you to leave, but you're not going anywhere. You're under contract. I've got plans for you. You're going to be in the first team, you know, very, very soon.

So just forget all that nonsense. And it kind of boggled my brain a little bit because I'd always wanted to play in Italy. And then the other temptation was the money.

Tottenham were offering vast sums of money, not just to me, but also to my mum. And my mum was working three jobs at the time, single parent in Barry. And I just thought this could change your life.

You know, she could get 100 grand just at the drop of a hat. Pay off her mortgage. This would be great. Plus the vast sums of money that I would get that I could help her out with as well.

[12:31] But then in the time that I'd asked to kind of think about my decision on what I should do, I had an injury.

I broke my ankle and I tore the ligaments. And I'd never really been injured before. And so I just assumed a bit of rehab. Time out in the gym.

And then I'll be back playing within a few months. But that didn't really happen. And I just didn't get better. And I started to panic.

And I was scared that this would be the end of my career. One young physio told me to start thinking about life outside of football. And then I knew it was serious. And I really did panic then.

And I set about a plan to deceive the club and the medical staff. And I just lied about paying, about everything.

[13:31] And I just wanted to play again. These days, you probably wouldn't get away with it. They don't trust players anymore because of silly people like me. Because of you, yes. Yeah. And I just made it worse.

And I kept playing and I kept training. And I knew I was never going to be the same player. Because I just couldn't do the things I could do before. And after every training session, my ankle would just balloon up.

And it was so frustrating because my mind was still working at 100 miles an hour. And my body just couldn't cope. And I didn't know what to do.

And Cardiff City came in for me. And Crystal Palace said, you can go to Cardiff for free. And that in itself really hit me quite hard.

And I kind of knew then I was finished. But I kept the lie going for another 18 months. And then at 20 years of age, I officially retired as a professional footballer.

[14:30] Wow. From medical advice. Yeah. Christian, I just want to go back. You sort of just dropped out as a casual sentence. I played for Wales.

What was it like to go onto the pitch representing your nation for the very first time? And it's hard for us to remember. But there'd actually be crowds watching in those days.

What was that like? It was incredible. To sing the national anthem. And then go out and represent your country doing what you love doing.

Doing something that you know you're fairly good at. And you've been recognized as being in the top 20 in the whole country. That was very, very special.

And the experience as well, playing on the continent. Playing against different countries. Different cultures. And meeting those players. It was a wonderful opportunity.

[15:27] And what position did you play? I either played centre-half in defence or in centre-midfield. Is there any moment that you sort of think, wow, I remember that so vividly?

And you could, I don't know, you lay in bed and you reimagine it. I think the most enjoyable moment I had playing for Wales was we played in a mini World Cup competition.

In Paris. And we beat Argentina in the quarter-final. And I scored a few goals, which is not a common occurrence for me. And I got man of the match.

And it was just a stunning moment. And I remember doing an interview with a guy from, I think he was from Uruguay. And he said, you do realise that everybody in this tournament is talking about you.

And that was quite exciting. You say it was quite a moment. How long does that moment of elation last? Oh, it can last for years.

[16:31] Oh, can it? Okay. Yeah, absolutely. When you had your injury and then the frustration and things not healing up as quickly as you would have imagined or hoped, Christian, did it ever cross your mind that you might pray?

No. Never thought about God at all? No. I think a surgeon mentioned prayer to me. I found a lump, which I got checked out.

And Crystal Palace were fantastic. They had me see this specialist within a few days. And he said he thought that it probably was cancer. And I'd need an operation to remove it.

And within another couple of days, I was on an operating table. And the guy who was going to do the operation, he was scanning me. And then he said, Mr. Diamond, get dressed. I'm cancelling the procedure. And I thought, it's too late.

I'm going to die. And he said, don't look so worried, young man. He said, there's no cancer. There's no problem. And I looked a bit confused. And he said, either you've been misdiagnosed.

[17:40] He said, I find that quite hard to understand because the guy who diagnosed you is the best. He's certainly the best in Europe, if not the world, of what he does. He doesn't make mistakes. So the only other explanation is somebody up there is looking out for you.

So you should pray and give thanks or something like that, he said. Something about prayer at the end. And I just laughed. I just thought, oh, I'm lucky. And I just assumed that specialist got it wrong. And that was it. It got on with my life. We must move on. But quickly, the high life, you know, it has a lot of temptations. You've got money. You've got opportunities. Girls, et cetera.

Were you falling into all these traps? Not so much with the kind of the drugs and that side of it or the gambling that can hit some players with temptation.

I was never tempted by that. And I'd met a girl in school at a young age who's now my wife. So she was 14. I was 15.

[18:38] So we'd been together. So I did have the night out, you know, on a weekend with teammates. But it wasn't such a common occurrence as it was for the single lads.

That's for sure. So did you carry this girl's satchel to school? I don't know if I was that romantic. I can't remember. I got told off by our coach.

It was an incredible man called John Cartwright. He was the youth team coach. And he told me off for walking to school. He caught me walking to school holding hands with an attractive young blonde girl.

And he said, you should be walking to school with a football, keeping it up the hallway. Maybe I had my priorities wrong. So you met her when she was 14.

What's her name? Carla. Carla. And was it love at first sight? And was the road of romance without any troubles? It was love at first sight, no doubt.

[19 : 36] And the only time we faced troubles was when my career came to an end with football. And I entered a pretty dark period in my life.

And I wasn't a very nice person to be around. And I really, I pushed her away. And so she moved back to London with her family for a few months. And then she just turned back up one day and said she'd missed me and wanted to make a go of it again without football in our life.

She'd always hated the fact that I was a footballer, which is quite refreshing because most other people were only nice to me and did nice things for me because I was a footballer.

That was quite ironic. So you come back together. At some stage, you're going to be confronted with Christian things. And when did this happen?

This is quite a few years down the line. So we got married, had children, good jobs and pretty lavish lifestyle. But we always wanted more.

[20 : 42] And I just thought that was the kind of people we were. We were just quite ungrateful. We would see it as ambitious. But we were always searching for the next big thing. However big the house we had, we wanted a bigger one.

I remember taking delivery of a brand new Mercedes. And the following day, I was at the Audi garage looking at the Audis. I was just never satisfied. I was always wanting bigger and better.

But then Carla started going to church or to church events, toddler groups, a lady's kind of testimony evening. And she came back one night and told me that she'd become a Christian.

And she started believing in Jesus. And she started reading all these Bible verses from John's Gospel to me. And I thought she'd lost her mind in that moment. But in the weeks that followed, there was this incredible change in her.

And I couldn't put my finger on it. But I wanted it. I wanted the contentment. I wanted the peace, the calmness, the patience, all this stuff that I was craving.

[21 : 47] But I didn't want to have to go to church to get it. I thought there must be another way. Tell me why. What was it about church that put you off? I think my stereotype of Christians would always be that Christians were very nice, kind people.

And I knew I wasn't. So I'd always felt that I wasn't good enough to be a Christian. You know, I knew the thoughts that I had. I knew the anger that I felt towards my dad, towards people that had bullied me in school.

I knew the bitterness I had about my football career ending. I wanted to blame someone. And I felt like I was always trying to keep a lid on all those pretty wicked thoughts that I had.

So I just thought, I'm just not a good enough person to be a Christian and go to church. When you look back, though, was there any thinking? This is before you became a Christian. Was there any thinking, Christian, that maybe God was looking after me?

You know, the incident you've said about the cancer. But there were other incidents, weren't there, in your life? Yeah, the one that really stands out is we were due to get married in Thailand on Christmas Day in 2004.

[23 : 03] And Carla fell pregnant with our eldest son, Kieran. And we were quite nervous. We'd lost a baby before that. And we just said, let's just get away.

And so we booked this trip to Thailand and get married on the beach. And it was all very romantic and exactly how Carla wanted it to be. But because she was so heavily pregnant, they wouldn't let her fly.

They said, you're going to have to cancel the trip and rearrange. You can't fly that heavily pregnant. And so we did. And we were pretty upset about that. And that Christmas, we were at my nan's house.

And it was on Boxing Day. And my nan said, oh, look, Thailand's on the news. That's where you should be right now. And we realized it was the other tsunami hit.

And we realized that the hotel that we were due to stay at was completely annihilated. And there were tens of thousands of people that lost their lives. And my nan repeated the same line that that surgeon had said years before.

[24 : 05] She said, maybe there's somebody up there looking out for you. And I did, just for the briefest of moments, I did think, what if?

What if there is a God? What if he saved me from that? But then I just thought, why would he save me? I'm not a nice person.

He would have saved nicer people than me. And the moment just went. Amazing. But had you met with Christians? When you say you tried to describe them, they're nice people.

And they're better than you. Had you met some? I don't know. In Barrie, there is a lot of Christian activity. Had you met real Christians? Yeah, I'd met quite a few, actually, with my job.

I was a security consultant for 12 years. And I had the opportunity to meet lots and lots of different people. And I really liked having Christian customers. And there was something.

[25 : 04] They would often give me booklets and alpha course leaflets and New Testaments and all these kind of things. And for some bizarre reason, I didn't throw them away.

I threw them in the cupboard. I never read them. But I kept them. And I never knew why. Very, very strange. Because if a Mormon gave me a book or I was never given a Koran or anything like that. But anything else, I just threw in the bin. But not these Christian booklets. Interesting. So, all right. So, you're seeing the change in your wife. You've got some recollection that maybe God has intervened in your life.

And there's a sympathy. What next? Well, Karl had dragged me to church. Just describe the first time you went into church. Were you embarrassed?

Were you sort of hiding yourself? Yeah. Yeah. It was slightly easier because it was the school that my children attended. The church was being renovated.

[26 : 08] And across the road from the church building itself was the school hall. And so, that's where they were having the Sunday services. So, it was familiar territory. So, I felt familiar where I was.

But, yeah. It was a head down. Straight to the seat. Don't talk to anyone. Don't look at anyone. The first time I went. Yeah. They weren't junior school seats, were they? They weren't very, very slow ones.

Thankfully not. No. Good. Well, of course, Grace Church Dulwich meets in a school as well. So, all right. You're there. And what were your impressions? Lovely people.

So, that they met all the stereotypes. A few odd people. A few people wearing socks and sandals. And I thought, oh, yeah. Yeah. This is something not right here.

But then, I could see how much it meant to Carla. She loved going to church. It was, she looked forward to it all week.

[27 : 07] She came out of church with a smile on her face. And I went for her. And the children were quite enjoying it as well with Sunday school. But I got bored. I didn't understand what the preaching was all about.

It just went straight over the top of my head. And I never grew up going to Sunday school or reading the Bible. So, I didn't know who Moses was and all these characters. So, I started to do silly things, really, to try and occupy my mind.

So, I would spot that somebody would sit in the same seat every Sunday. So, I would deliberately sit in their seat. And I just, I was an idiot, really. Okay.

So, when you say you didn't understand, were you not paying attention at all? Or you really just couldn't grasp what was being said? I think I understood, the bits that I did listen to, I understood it at an intellectual level.

So, I got the kind of the surface layer of the story. But I didn't look beyond. There was no spiritual dimension as far as I was concerned.

[28 : 15] It was all in the here and the now. So, whenever something supernatural was mentioned, I would kind of raise my eyebrows and go, right turn. When you went home, did you question Carla?

No. Not much. She tried to, in my mind, she was pitching me. Because I was in a sales environment. Every time she tried to explain something to me, I was like, oh, you're just trying to pitch me.

You're trying to recruit me. And I just thought, no, I'm not having that. And because I earned quite a lot of money at the time, I thought, I wonder if the church are just trying to get me so that I give money to the church.

They'll be asking to pay for a new roof or something or other. And I thought, I'm not getting embroiled in that. Amazing. And so, how long did this continue? Several months.

Several months. Were you hard to live with during that time, do you think? I think I was because I was jealous of Carla. I was frustrated. And as much as I enjoyed this new person that she was, she had this new man in her life that I couldn't keep up with.

[29 : 25] And I realized I wasn't her first love anymore. And I had a taste of that when we had children. I had to share her affection and attention with the children. And but this was different because this person that I was competing with, this Jesus, well, he couldn't put a foot wrong in Carla's eyes.

You know, everything he did was perfect. Everything he said was perfect. And I thought, well, I'm not. How am I going to live up to that? So when did the crunch moment come and how? What happened? Yeah, that the pastor of the church, a guy called Merv Neal, was preaching through Corinthians. And he was talking about how to be a godly dad. And a godly husband. I think that I'm a godly husband because I provide nice things for my wife, but I hardly see her. And we don't have much quality time. I think I'm a good dad because I lavish my children with gifts. I take them to Florida. I buy them whatever they want. They've got nice things. But I never spent much time with them. And I was convicted by that. And then I had what people might call an experience.

[30 : 31] But it wasn't really the typical Christian experience. I didn't experience a feeling of love or joy or contentment or any of those things. I felt pretty scared.

Because in that moment, I knew that God was real. And that scared me. Because I was only really sure of one thing. When I tried to describe what happened to Carla when we got home. I said, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. All I know is if I die today, I'm not going to heaven. And I'd always assumed that if there was a God and if there was a heaven and a hell, I would go to heaven.

Because I'm not, although I'm not a good person, I'm not the worst of people. I'm not a murderer. I'm not a rapist or a child abuser. So I'll be okay.

But on that day, I knew I wasn't okay. But the bad stuff that I'd done was directly offensive to God. And I'd been ignoring him my whole life. And that wasn't good.

[31 : 37] I'm just trying to understand this experience. Was there a sense of you committing yourself to Christ or trusting Jesus?

Or was it just an understanding about what the Christian message was? And it was beginning to fall into place for you and you were happy to go along with it? Yeah, I don't feel that I was coming to faith in Christ in that moment.

I think that was the moment I knew God was real. But I had no concept of forgiveness. I just felt like I was being reminded of everything that I'd done wrong.

Even the stuff that I'd pushed to the back of my mind. And it was like it all came unfolding in one moment. In a big flood. Every horrible word I'd said.

Every evil thought. Every bad deed. When I stole an ice cream from a shop in Panath. And it all came flooding back. And it was horrible.

[32 : 37] It was overwhelmingly horrible. I didn't know it at the time. But tears were streaming down my face. And people around me. My kids looked pretty scared looking at me. They never see me cry.

And they just said I went white. Like a sheet. And it was several weeks later. When I finally went back to church.

It was then that I experienced the love. And the joy and the peace. And I actually listened to the sermon properly. And Merv was talking about Jesus.

And he was talking about the cross. And how we can trust in Jesus. And when we do that. And whoever we are. I kept hearing that word.

Whoever. Anyone. And I thought that. That includes me. I'm whoever. I can be in that category. This is so inclusive. And.

[33 : 31] And I thought. It sounded too good to be true though. That was the bit I was wrestling with. I thought why. What all I have to do is trust Jesus. That he's died on the cross for me. And washed away my sin.

That. That's incredible. Why would he do that for me? Why me? I don't get it. But I believe it. And my pastor told me that's enough. Really?

How long ago was that Christian? That was 2012. Right. You're leaving me to work that out. Okay. Nine years. Yeah. And Christian. What impact did it make on you immediately?

There were two things. That came very clearly. To me. The first was that we were to. To get rid of everything that we had. So all the material stuff.

Sell the house. The money. Just get rid of it. Give it away. And the church. Needed some money. To finish the renovation. So my plan was. Let's sell the home.

[34 : 28] Get rid of it all. And give the money to the church. And Carla agreed. The second burden I had. Was to preach. And that didn't make sense.

Because I didn't know what I was preaching about. I hadn't even. Had the foggiest idea. Of how to do that. So I kind of put that on the back burner. And thought. No I'm not. I'm not for that. I'll give everything away. Not got an issue with that. But I'm not preaching. That's a big step though. To give everything away. Yeah. It didn't quite work out. How we. How we planned. We didn't end up giving the money.

To our church. We ended up. Pretty much giving the house away. And. When the guy came around. To view it. He was a bit suspicious. As why we just dropped the price.

By 50, 60 grand overnight. And it was his exact budget. And he said. What's the catch? And I said. There's no catch. It's just. I've just come to faith in Jesus. I've become a Christian.

[35 : 23] And God's told me to do this. So you're the beneficiary of this. I wanted to give the money to my church. It's not panned out that way. But you're going to get it. And he smiled. And he said. I'm a pastor.

Of a church. Just down the road. This house is now going to be used. For God's glory. Your home gym that you had. Is going to be a prayer room. Your cinema room. Is going to be a room set up for counselling. Your triple garage. Is going to be used to store furniture. For people in the town. Who can't afford to buy their own. And yeah. That was a beautiful moment.

That's remarkable. So that was nine years ago. And we can see on the screen. It says Pastor Christian Diamonds. So have you become a church minister then? Yes.

So in. When was it? 2015. I quit my job. And the company I was working for.

[36 : 18] I thought I'd completely lost the plot. They offered me more money. And. And I told them what I was earning. As the church apprentice. And he laughed. And he said.

That's not enough to pay your mortgage. And I said. Well. We're trusting God to provide. And. Entered full-time ministry.

Got involved in the youth work. A bit of preaching. A bit of evangelism. A bit of Bible studies. A bit of everything really. And then went to Bible college. Whilst I was serving full-time in the church. I became the assistant pastor in the church.

And then. Two years ago. Wellington Chapel. Near Hereford. Asked me to. Consider being their pastor. And I accepted.

And yeah. Been here since. Easter. 2019. That's remarkable. To be honest. I've preached there. It's one of the many, many churches. Where I preached once. And they never had me back. But that's a different story.

[37 : 16] I've got a long list of those. I'll have you back. Yeah. The. The. The. The. The. The difference is made in you. Clearly. That's a big step to.

You know. It looks so. God's hand was on. You're giving your house. Et cetera. Away. But. What was happening. Internally. Yeah. I think. The biggest emotional change.

Was the bitterness. Just went. So that. That anger. And that frustration. That I had. And in many ways. I think I was. Angry at a God. That I didn't believe in.

I blamed God. That we. We lost. Our first child. I blamed God. That I wasn't a footballer. I blamed God. That I didn't have contentment. And peace. But then I come to realize.

That. I have. So much more. So I didn't have the big fancy house. And all the fancy things. I didn't have. Thousands of people. Clapping me.

[38 : 12] And cheering my name. I had none of that. But I had. More. And that was really difficult. To explain to my closest friends. And my family. Because. I think some of them thought.

That I was being cruel. To my children. You know. How will you be able to take them to Florida. Now. You can't. And I said. No I can't. But.

We'll have good quality. Time together as a family. We'll. We'll go camping. If we have to. And we'll have a great time. We didn't. Because camping is terrible. But. We tried. You'll have to try camping in Yorkshire. Michael agrees that. That camping is terrible. There we are. And. And. Time's gone really.

Have you been able to. Chat these things through with your father. We tried. Sadly. I don't know where he is. In the world. So we.

[39 : 07] We lost contact. Some years ago. So yeah. I fully expect. One day. That he might. Walk into the church. Or. We'll.

We'll meet again. Hopefully. And your mother. Yeah. So. Really good relationship with my mum. And. With. Mother's Day approaching on Sunday. Oh indeed. Yes.

What does she think. About. Your new life. I think she thought it was a phase. That it would pass. But now. She sees that. It's really changed us.

As a family. And it's changed me. And she can see that we're not being cruel. To our children. Although they have less. Materially. Their lives are so much richer.

And. Yeah. She. She's very happy for us. And. She comes along to church as well. When she comes to visit. That's wonderful. It's really good to meet you. Have you ever been.

[40 : 04] Any good at spelling? It's just that you've got. Christian diamond. And they're both. Words are spelt wrongly. Yeah. Ironically. Even though we weren't brought up in a Christian home.

My name's Christian. My brother's James. And my other brother is Joshua. So. Biblical names. But my mum liked the Scandinavian spelling. So. All right. Okay. Christian.

That's great to hear your story. Really good to meet you. It's very, very powerful. When you. I don't know. When you go back home to. South Wales. But. Do people.

I don't know. Recognize you in the street. Football fans of old. Now and again. Yeah. Not. Not so often nowadays. But. But years ago. They did.

And. I found it a little bit frustrating. Actually. Because. The newspaper. The South Wales Echo. Reported that I'd quit. They made no mention of my injury. And so.

[41 : 01] I would have quite a few dads. Approach me and say. My son would have given his right arm. To have the opportunities you had. And you just threw it all away. What a waste. Oh. Right. Okay. And I didn't want to be that stereotypical guy.

Who says. Oh. I would have made it. But I got injured. Because. Pretty much every guy down the pub. On a Saturday night. Has that story. Indeed. Christian.

Thank you very much. Do stay. We may be able to chat a little bit at the end. I wonder if I could just round things off. It really is good to be with you. I so wish I could have been. In.

In Dulwich. I enjoyed my time there. Two years ago. Immensely. And I think it's. Christopher Idol. I can just see there. It's a. It's a very. Misty sort of lens. Christopher. But it's good to see you.

And I'd love to be able to chat with you all again. But never mind. Here we are. This is something I read this morning. In the Bible. I became a Christian when I was 15. So you can see.

[41 : 55] Not very long ago either. And. I. I like to. Start each day. Just by reading the Bible. And praying. And I read this. This morning. And I thought. Do you know. I might just share this. With the folk at Dulwich.

It comes at the end of. A very important book of the Bible. Called Romans. It was written by the Apostle Paul. To the Christians who were in Rome. He'd not yet been to Rome.

He knew there was a church there. Or Christians there. And I think he was writing really. To make sure they'd fully understood the Christian message. And so he spells out exactly what it means to be a Christian.

And it's a very significant book. Some of the great Christian leaders throughout history. Have been converted to Christ. Through reading this book. Perhaps.

I don't know. The most famous one of all is Martin Luther. 500 years ago. In Germany. It was to trigger the Reformation. I think more recently. Interestingly. John Suchet.

[42 : 50] Not John Suchet. Sorry. His brother. David Suchet. Poirot. In a hotel room. Found a Gideon Bible. And he read the book of Romans. And came to trust Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

I don't know that even Poirot has the same influence as Martin Luther had. But nevertheless. But having gone through the arguments. Paul then just tackles one or two sort of current theological practical issues of Christian living.

And one of them was the issue of can you eat food as a Christian that has been first of all offered to idols. And so Paul goes into all of this.

And in the argument he comes out with an absolute gem of a truth. I just want to share it with you and then just chat. We haven't got many minutes left. But this is what it says in Romans chapter 14 verse 17.

For the kingdom of God is not food and drink. But righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The verse before he talks about God the Father.

[43 : 54] The verse before that he talks about the Lord Jesus Christ dying for our sin. So you have Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Of course Christians believe there's one God who's in three persons. And there is one of the little triplets that we get which often comes throughout the Bible. But it's this idea.

The kingdom of God is not food and drink. But righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. You say what on earth does that mean? I think the way Christianity is portrayed very often in the media gives the impression that we as people, you know, we don't do certain things.

And they'll have their list. We have this stereotypical idea that a Christian doesn't go here and doesn't do that. And we're getting involved in this. And he's opposed to such and such, et cetera. And then the notion, you know, that we sing hymns like For Those in Peril on the Sea or Onward Christian Soldiers and I Vow to Be My Country.

This sort of idea of a Christian being a very somber sort of person who refuses certain things and lives their life. And yet here's the Apostle Paul writing to these people. As I say, he's not met them.

[45 : 04] But he said, I don't want you to misunderstand. Christianity is not about what you eat or what you drink. Now, if that sounds very foreign to you, very strange, you've only got to stop and think for a moment about other religions.

And very often they have sort of rules and restrictions about what you can and can't eat. You know, if you were a Hindu, you certainly wouldn't be eating beef. And if you're a Muslim or a Jew, you're not going to be eating your sausage roll or your pork sandwich.

And so we can go on. But here is Paul saying, no, no, no. This isn't what Christianity is all about. In fact, he has three words that he says, if you want to understand what the kingdom of God, what Christian experience is all about, understand these three words.

Now, the first one is not a word we particularly use in everyday conversation, as Christian says, down at the pub on a Saturday night. It's this word righteousness.

You want to understand Christianity? Then you have to understand the Christian experience is about righteousness. I grew up in. Yeah.

[46 : 11] In Yorkshire, I went along to a tiny little Methodist chapel and I was there with my mum and dad and my my older brother. The four of us there were the third of the congregation. And I was the youngest.

My older brother was the next youngest. And my parents were the next youngest by far. So you get the idea. And I went there for many years until eventually I said to my parents, I don't want to go anymore. But I think one of the things that was instilled in my young mind at that stage was that Christianity is about being righteous.

Christianity is about doing the right thing and not doing the wrong thing. That's what it's all about. But actually, that's not what righteousness is as far as the Bible's concerned.

Clearly, what we know about God is what God has told us. He's revealed himself to us. And he's revealed himself as a holy God. Impeccably holy.

Totally holy. Sin is absolutely abhorrent to him. Could I ever be like God? And you sort of think, well, no, I couldn't.

[47 : 20] And Christian was honest about his own life, wasn't he? That he knew certain things, whether it was just Mickey, whatever it was, chocolate in Panath or an ice cream in Panath, whatever it was.

He knew he wasn't holy or righteous. But how could I ever be like God? And the answer is, I never could. Let me try and keep the Ten Commandments.

Let me try and love the Lord my God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. Or love my neighbour as myself. That's how Jesus summarises the Ten Commandments. And I fall short. I fail. So if the Christian life is about being righteous, hey, I've no chance.

Ah, but Paul has just spoken about the cross. In a few weeks' time, we'll be focusing attention again, won't we, on the cross. That the baby who was born in Bethlehem was destined to die on a cross.

I cannot imagine the suffering that Jesus went through. I just, the physical anguish. The emotional anguish.

[48 : 24] But actually, the anguish that Jesus suffered more than any other was that when Jesus was on the cross, God was to scoop up the sin of the world.

Now, some of those sins, you know, we almost enjoy by what's going on. But actually, none of it's, none of it's appealing to a holy God.

He hates respectable sins. He hates the sins that we feel are absolutely dreadful. And he sees what we're like. And our wrongdoing, our falling short, clearly would cut us off from God.

But when Jesus was on the cross, God took our sin and laid it on Jesus, who paid for it. And when a person becomes a Christian, our past is dealt with.

It's forgiven. Now, again, Christian talked about that. We are forgiven because Jesus has paid the penalty for our wrongdoing. But more than that, when a person asks Jesus to become their Lord and Savior, Jesus' righteousness, the holiness of God, is transferred to us.

[49 : 37] It's the most amazing exchange. 2,000 years ago, our sin laid on Jesus Christ. The moment one becomes a Christian, whether it's nine years ago or a few more for me, his righteousness given to me.

The kingdom of God is not about what you can eat or drink. It's about righteousness. But Paul goes one step further. And interesting, Christian mentioned both these two words.

It's about peace. Now, again, you get this sort of, I don't know, religious notion that religious people, Christians, go around and just say, peace, peace.

But this isn't the peace that Paul is talking about here. It's peace with God. Peace with God. I don't know if you've ever spoken to somebody who's just been told that they have a terminal illness and they have so many weeks or months to live.

It's incredibly shocking. We all know that, you know, today could be our last day on earth. We live with that sort of Damocles sword always hanging over our head.

[50 : 45] But when you're actually told, no, no, no, this is serious. I've spoken to people like this and wow. Is it possible to face death? And to face God, as we all will do, with peace?

Can we have peace with God? And Paul says, yes, this is what the kingdom of God is all about. This is what Christian experience is about.

It's righteousness. Our sin has been taken away. Jesus' righteousness transferred to us and we have peace with God. I've talked to some people who've become Christians and they've said, you know, the overwhelming emotion that they felt was they felt clean inside.

I've talked with others and for the first time, the mad rush, the constant trying to achieve peace was gone because they did achieve it.

A settled calm of peace fell upon them. Because it's a lovely thing to be able to put your head on your pillow at night and think if I never wake up again, I'm ready to meet almighty God because my sin has been dealt with and I've been reconciled to him.

[51 : 52] But it's also a wonderful thing to wake up in the morning and think, well, with God's help, I'm going to live this day with him. And yes, for him. But he'll go before me and beside me, behind me as I go through the course of this day.

He's in control. Was it God keeping Christian and Carla back from Thailand before that tsunami? Was it God dealing with a possible cancer?

Do you know, God's hand is on us. But in a very real way, Christians experience God with them moment by moment. And in the toughest times to be able to cry out to God and say, Lord, help.

But also in times of joy and where we just want to give thanks. It's lovely to have somebody to thank. I don't know. I mentioned this this lunchtime when I was talking to folk in the city.

At the moment, my garden, which is we've got a copse, really. It's narrow. It's just a terrace house. But you've got a copse going down to the river wharf for 92 steps down.

[52 : 52] And at the moment, it's just one blanket of snowdrops. It's just gorgeous. And every day I go and just look at them, feast my eyes on the snowdrops. And thank God for the beauty, the wonder of creation.

I have peace with God. And just one other thing. Kingdom of God says, Paul, it's not about what you can eat and drink. No, no, no. I say it's not what you do. It's very simple. And it's not a trivial thing. These are serious, big issues. And it's not a negative thing. He loves the word not. He says it's not about food and drink. It's about righteousness. It's about peace and joy of the Holy Spirit. I enjoy a good laugh. And I enjoy teasing. I enjoy fun. I love to read Matt in the Daily Telegraph, even if I don't get the paper. I love to see what Matt is writing. Oh, you know, his little cartoon, because he can make me laugh out loud.

[53 : 51] But that's not joy. It's fun. It's laughter. It's merriment. But to have joy, God actually with us, moment by moment. I don't know, there's an overwhelming peace and an overwhelming joy.

You see, when a person trusts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, their past is forgiven. Righteousness is given. And God, by his Holy Spirit, the personal power of God, comes to live within.

I don't know whether you realise, but you're looking, yes, at Roger Carswell, but you're looking at a temple. Oh, God lives within this little being of mine. And there's a joy in that. Life can be tough. And I know we've all experienced hard times. But to have the Lord with us is a wonderful, wonderful thing. And I really do commend to you the Lord Jesus. I want to say, look, he loved you. He died for you. He was buried. He rose from the dead. That risen, living Saviour wants you to turn from going your own way and start to trust and follow the Lord Jesus.

[55 : 00] You'll find forgiveness. You'll find new life. You'll find righteousness. And you'll find peace and joy. And do you know, the Bible promises that it's everlasting.

When eventually I die, I won't go to the hell that I deserve, because we all do deserve it. If we could see how bad we really are in the sight of the Holy God, I will go to heaven, not because I'm good enough.

But heaven is not a reward for doing good. Heaven is a gift which Jesus purchased and offers to us all. Well, it's time for me to stop. The clock is saying that.

But not only that, it's saying low battery. Your Mac will sleep soon unless you get plugged into power. Well, yes, there's a power from above for every person who calls on the name of the Lord. Before I hand back to Katie, can I just pray a little prayer very similar to the one that I prayed when I trusted Christ? And perhaps tonight, maybe for the first time, you would pray this prayer with me and call upon the name of the Lord.

[56 : 05] That's how the Bible puts it. And find that he gives his righteousness and his peace and his joy. A little prayer. Perhaps you can pray this with me. Dear God, thank you for this evening.

Thank you for the provision of Zoom. And thank you for Christian story. Thank you that the Lord Jesus loved me and died for me and rose again for me. Please forgive me. Come and live within me. Please become my Lord and Saviour. And help me to follow you. For I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, God bless you. Let me hand back to Katie who will tell us more of the things we should know. Thank you, Roger. And thank you, Christian, to both of you.

Huge thanks for being with us this evening and for sharing so openly with us all. And thanks to everyone else here who's been listening in all evening. Thank you so much. And as I mentioned earlier, it may well be that you've got some questions, perhaps for Christian, perhaps for Roger, perhaps for someone at Grace Church Dulwich.

[57 : 10] There'll be an email address popping up soon. Do please get in touch. We'd love, love, love to hear from you. As I mentioned earlier, this is the first in our series of events. And so there are two other evenings, very similar to this, coming up this week that you might be interested in.

So on Thursday, Roger will be with Yvonne Edwards, who worked in the city for a number of years and seemingly had everything. And yet she wasn't satisfied. And it was when she turned to drug and alcohol and was later in rehab that she considered Christian and things.

That's on Thursday. On Saturday, Roger will be joined by Piyush Jani, who was brought up in a Hindu family, came to the UK as a teenager, trained to be a doctor, went on to become a surgeon and then looked at Christian things too.

So that's on Saturday. It's exactly the same format as this. It's on Zoom, eight till nine o'clock. And you'd also be extremely welcome to join us at any of our regular Sunday morning services.

And this Sunday, Roger will actually be speaking to us. And at the moment, we're meeting either online or actually in person at Rosendale Primary School in West Dulwich.

[58 : 17] You'd be really, really welcome to join us. There'll be more details about that on the website if you're interested. Bear with me. Two more things to mention. Firstly, maybe you'd be interested in looking at a biography of Jesus's life.

Perhaps reading it through for yourself or maybe with a Christian friend. Or if you'd like to, you do get in touch with the email address that will come up. And we'd love to put you in touch with someone from Grace Church Dulwich. We'd be thrilled to do that with you.

And also coming up, starting next week, Wednesday the 17th, there's a short call starting. It's called Christianity Explored. It runs for three weeks and gives you the opportunity to look at the life and claims of Jesus.

And we'd love you to join us for that too. Again, please email if you'd like further details about that. Well, that's everything for this evening. It's been absolutely brilliant to have you with us. Thank you so much for coming.

We hope you've enjoyed your evening. And finally, a big thank you to Roger and Christian. Thanks. Thank you.

[60 : 01] extra time. Thank you. ■ morp you are going to say goodbye. We hope you've enjoyed this evening.

Go to behind the scenes. Bye. Thank you. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Thank you.