

Real Lives with Roger Carswell

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Preacher: Roger Carswell

- [0 : 00] Now we're delighted to have Roger Carlswell with us as our speaker this morning. He's the one, of course, who's been doing the interviewing throughout the week.
- And we thought it'd be a good idea just to get to know him a little bit first before he speaks to us. I'm going to hand over to Vicky Widows. Thanks, Simon. And thank you, Roger.
- It's been great this week, hasn't it, hearing those stories of how Christian and Yvonne and Priash put their trust in Jesus and hearing those stories explained so clearly.
- And in just a few minutes now, it's our turn to turn the spotlight on Roger. And so, Roger, I wonder if you could tell us briefly. Sadly, we haven't got the half an hour that we had during the week, but could you tell us briefly your story of how you came to put your trust in Jesus?
- Yes, thanks very much. And it's really good to have been with you all. And if you didn't watch any or missed, you know, for some reason, any of those programs do have a look on YouTube because they are fascinating tales that these people told.
- [1 : 07] Mine isn't quite so dramatic. I was brought up in Yorkshire. Well, that is a good start in life, of course. And I was brought up with very God fearing parents in the sense that we went to church, I think, three times every Sunday morning, Sunday school in the afternoon and then the evening service.
- It's only a tiny church. I think there were about a dozen of us in the church. And a third of those was was the family I belonged to. I was the youngest, my older brother, the next youngest, then my parents, the next youngest and all the others seem very, very ancient.
- But we read the Bible every morning at breakfast time. We prayed as a family. But when I got to, I don't know, 11, 12, 13, that sort of age, I became a bit bored with church. I didn't write off the things of God by any means. I went to different churches in the area trying to understand.
- But my mother was Armenian. She grew up in the Lebanon. My father was a Yorkshireman. But my relatives ran a Christian hospital in Beirut in the Lebanon.
- They would give free treatment to anybody and everybody, and they would speak to them about the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously, as a family, we'd been out there to visit my relatives and to have holidays there in the summer.
- [2 : 17] But when I was 15, I went there by myself and had a wonderful, wonderful summer with my folk. We were staying in a big house up in the in the mountains of Lebanon.
- It had been an orphanage and it was up for sale and we were using it and endless games of tennis and cricket and baseball and croquet. And then going down and swimming in the Mediterranean is a wonderful, wonderful holiday.
- But I just I just saw my my relatives who are Christians and they were very earnest, very devout. They they were prayerful, but they were great fun. They would speak to people, anybody they met about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it got me thinking, am I a Christian? What is a Christian? What makes these people tick? What's so different about them compared with me? And one day, my uncle, who I always think was far, far too old to play tennis.

I think he must have been 40 and that's surely past the age of playing tennis. But anyway, he offered to play tennis with me and we had a great game. I like to think I beat him, but I wonder whether my recollection of the events is slightly different to his.

[3 : 23] I don't know, but it's we had this game of tennis. And then walking back from the tennis court, he began to talk with me about Christian things. And I was very, very open to talk.

And eventually we went to a little clearing in the woods, in the mountains of the Lebanon, where they used to have barbecues. I can picture it. I've never been back, but I can picture it. And we sat on a log and he opened up a New Testament.

And he went through various verses of the New Testament from the book of Romans, all from the book of Romans, showing, first of all, that there is a God. And then he explained how all of us have sinned.

Well, hey, I was a teenage boy and a very, yeah, a mischievous boy. Let's just say that. And so I knew I'd done wrong and I had a keen sense of right and wrong. And then he showed me from the Bible very clearly how when Jesus died on the cross, he had died paying for my sin.

I'd never understood that before, that God looked forward in time, took my sin and laid it on Jesus. And he showed me the verse God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[4 : 27] And he went on to explain, of course, about Jesus rising from the dead. But what struck me was that Jesus died for me. And I thought if God loved me enough for Jesus to die for me, then the least I can do is trust him.

And so age 15, he challenged me, Roger, have you ever come to a time in your life where you've asked Jesus to forgive you and become your Lord and Savior? And I knew I hadn't.

And I said so. And I said, I'd like to. But I was a fun loving sort of character. And he said, look, Roger, this is serious. It can be costly. It can be tough to be a Christian. But I thought if Jesus loved me enough to die for me, then I really should trust him.

And so that day, I remember it very, very clearly, August 25th, 1965, about five minutes to midday. I prayed and I asked Jesus to forgive me and come and live in my life.

And I often say it was like a hinge which changed the whole direction of my life. I didn't feel any difference after praying. But I did notice over the next few days, for the first time in my life, I had a desire to pray and a desire to read the Bible and a desire to live for Christ.

[5 : 35] He said to me, when you get back home, Roger, you need to tell your friends about Jesus. And I thought, oh, I could never tell John Fossard, my sort of partner in mischief, about Christ. But do you know, it became the most natural thing in the world that I wanted to talk about Christ to others.

That's brilliant. Thank you so much, Roger. We fast forward a few years. You mentioned during the week in your talk that you were a school teacher. What made you give that up? Well, in those days, you could teach without having any teaching qualifications.

And so somehow I scraped in and I taught for eight years in a very rough boys secondary modern school in a place called Batley in West Yorkshire. And where we it was called a social priority school.

We used to get actually extra money for being willing to teach in this school. Which was great. And then I taught in a 13 to 18 mixed comprehensive school. So 11 years I was a teacher.

But during that time, I was involved in sharing the gospel, in running missions and all sorts of things in the Yorkshire area. I would also travel sometimes. I remember doing a fortnight's mission in Bedford.

[6 : 45] So I would teach nine till four and then drive down in my little minivan in those days down to Bedford, preach, drive back, go to school the next day for two weeks, etc. Did another one like that in Northampton and etc.

And there was a tremendous pressure on me time wise. But as well, there was a sense increasingly so that God really wanted me to leave teaching, which I normally enjoy, not always, but normally enjoyed.

But to give myself to going around and proclaiming the gospel. So it seemed to me at that time a huge step. But I went to see the headmaster and handed in my notice. Looking back, I don't think it was such a big step.

But at the time, it seemed like that. Thank you. Roger, sadly, time is short. But just one last question before we move on. Can you just tell us perhaps one or two of the challenges and the joys that you've had in the last 55 years of living as a Christian?

Wow, it sounds a long time, doesn't it? But anyway, yeah, I've never, never, not even for one moment, regretted becoming a Christian. The joy of meeting with God day by day as I read the Bible and pray and then going into the day saying, God, you just take control of this day.

[7 : 57] And I love talking to people about the Lord Jesus. And I love just being, you know, it's basically whoever one bumps into. And in Yorkshire, if you stand next to somebody at a bus queue, you do talk to them.

And it's not like a London tube where you glower at each other across the aisle. People do talk. And I love to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ. There have been some tough times, though.

And we all have, we battle against human frailty, don't we? And I've had my lows, my dark times. But I think most people have, but I've never lost that sense of the Lord being with me.

I have to say, I think the last maybe three, four years have been the toughest times as far as actually seeing people become Christians. I think there's become a, I don't know, a sort of, it's not a nasty hostility, but a quiet hostility to responding to Christ.

And so these have been tough times, but one keeps going. And I love the Lord Jesus Christ. He's never once been a disappointment to me. That's great. Thank you so much, Roger.

[9 : 05] And thank you again for joining us all week this week. Thanks. Well, we're now going to have our reading from the Bible. It's from the book of 1 Samuel. It's the passage which Roger will then be speaking on.

And Fumi is going to read it for us from home. The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow.

But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, As soon as the child is weaned, I'll bring him so that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever.

And she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh, my Lord, as you live, my Lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord.

[10 : 33] For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore, I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord.

And he worshipped the Lord there. Well, good morning and happy Mother's Day to all of you in Dulwich. I wish I could be with you this morning. I do remember that Sunday service when I was with you a couple of years ago.

I'd love to have been back in real person, but we all understand the situation. And I thought I'd think a little bit about prayers. I don't know about you, but I have recollections of my first childhood bedroom.

Maybe it wasn't the first, but I suppose I must have been in a sort of nursery in a cot to begin with. But I remember above my bed as a little boy was a reproduction of Joshua Reynolds' famous picture, the infant Samuel.

I wonder what happened to that picture. But it's stayed indelibly in my mind ever since. I love the story of Samuel. And you probably know that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, to begin with, couldn't have children.

[11 : 40] And she earnestly prayed that God would indeed give her a child. And sure enough, she's one of a number of ladies in the Bible who prayed the similar prayer. And miraculously or wonderfully, God answered that prayer.

And later on, talking about Samuel, this is what we read in the book of Samuel. 1 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 27. She says, For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of him.

It's a lovely sort of testimony, isn't it? But she said, this child came as an answer to prayer because it didn't seem as though naturally I was going to be able to have children. Last year when I went through my Bible, I like to read through the Bible once a year to keep the big picture fully in my mind.

And I try to do something, look for something different every year. And I used a yellow crayon and I just marked all the prayers that there were in the Bible. Some of them are quite lengthy and they're on huge, big, big issues.

And others of them are quite small. I thought I'd just think briefly this morning, Mother's Day, about some of the prayers that there are in the Bible. There's a specific one of this lovely mother, Hannah, which means full of grace, praying that the Lord would give her a child.

[12 : 56] For this child I prayed, and the Lord answered her. It's a good thing to pray. And it's a good thing for mothers and fathers, of course, to pray for their children.

We want as much as we can to input into our children, don't we, and give them all we can to provide for them without spoiling them, to discipline them. And yet make sure they enjoy a happy childhood.

But one of the best things we can do is pray for our children. We pray with them, I trust. You know, whether it's every night time or sometime in the morning or just before meals. And we pray and we pray.

We teach the children to pray. But for us privately, to be praying is a great thing. There was a famous missionary to the islands now we call Vanuatu in the Pacific.

They were called the New Hebrides. The missionary was a man called John Paton. And he recalls his parents' prayers. There were 12 children.

[13 : 54] This is in the 1800s. And he would sometimes go down early in the morning and he'd hear his parents praying for each of the children. One of the greatest things we can do is pray for our children.

Now, Hannah was very practical as well because she used to make a coat for him every year and take it up to the temple where little Samuel was growing up. So there was practical involvement. But she prayed for him.

And I'd ask all of us, and especially on Mother's Day, mothers, be mothers who pray for your children. Because in praying, it's not just crossing our fingers, hoping for the best touching wood sort of thing.

But it's speaking to Almighty God, who has the power to bring all things into being. But he also, this infinite God, is an intimate God.

He's interested in all the details of each of our lives. And as we pray, God hears and he wonderfully answers. For this child I prayed, and the Lord granted my petition, which I asked of him.

[14 : 53] And I'm sure if you pray regularly, daily, for your children, God will hear. And you'll be able to say, yes, the Lord granted my petition, which I asked of him. I miss my mother.

She went to be with the Lord some years ago. She was a Christian lady. And I often think, oh, I'd love to talk to my mother. But I know she prayed for me. And to have that sort of heritage and that input is a great thing.

But there are many other prayers in the Bible. And yes, we can talk about some of the really, really big ones. But I thought we'd focus on some of the short prayers that there are. I love the prayer of Peter.

Remember, he was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. And there was an occasion when Jesus sent off the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee. Really, it was a huge lake, 26 miles long, 13 miles wide.

And there were often storms on that lake, that Sea of Galilee. But in the middle of the night, Jesus came walking on the water to these disciples in the boat.

[15 : 53] And Peter, he often opened his mouth before he connected it to his brain. But he just said, oh, let me come and join you on the water if it's you. And Jesus invited him to come. But as he stepped onto the water, he panicked.

When he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the water around, he panicked and began to sink. And he cries out just a quick prayer. Lord, save me.

It's a great prayer. Lord, help. And the Lord Jesus, of course, reached out and did indeed save him, rescue him. There are times in our lives where, I don't know, life can become very tough.

There are storms, if you want, real difficulties. And it's hard to know what to say, what to do, what to pray. Well, just to cry out a sort of arrow prayer to heaven.

Lord, save me. Lord, help. We thought a lot this week about the intimidation and attacks on women. And I remember reading a little book some time ago.

[16 : 57] It was published in America. I forgot the title. But it was saying to anybody who might be in a situation where they're attacked, pray out loud to the name of Jesus, if anything like that ever happens.

And the author was suggesting, first of all, that God hears and answers prayer. But secondly, he was saying before anybody does anything dreadful, they have to put out of their mind the thought of God and righteousness.

But by you praying out loud to Jesus, it puts the thought of God back into their mind. It's an interesting thought. But there are times, and especially if it's sort of, there's a foundation of regular praying that we just have to call out quickly to the Lord.

And the God who is, is a God who delights to hear and answer prayer. Lord, save me. Lord, may I have this child.

And then there's another prayer I'd like us to think about. And they're the Saviour's prayers, the Lord Jesus. We read that often he went to pray. He went to the Garden of Gethsemane and he often prayed there.

[18 : 00] We read that he rose a great while before day, departed to a solitary place, and he prayed. So he set an example of prayer. Some of his longer prayers are recorded.

There's a very powerful prayer in John chapter 17 where he's praying for Christians to be, you know, the church for the future. We know about the Lord's Prayer when the disciples said, teach us to pray.

And he said, our Father who art in heaven, this is how we should pray. But there are some very brief prayers as well which the Lord Jesus Christ prayed. Two of them when he was on the cross.

We know that the Lord Jesus Christ was taken after this life of service and dedication where he did miraculous things. He lived a perfect and pure life. He taught incredible things. But eventually he was to go to the cross.

We know that. And he was destined to die. He came into the world to die because he was going to, on that cross, pay for the sin of the world. But he made seven statements which were recorded when he was on the cross.

[19 : 00] And the first and the last one were both prayers. He spoke to his Father. The first one, he prayed, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.

Amazing, isn't it? So here were these Roman executioners. Here was a howling mob of people who had been crying out, crucifying, crucifying. And Jesus, in the most intensity of suffering and agony, physical pain, of course, emotional pain, because those who once had left everything to follow him now just like frightened sheep scattered.

And he was going to have intense spiritual pain as he was taking on himself the sin of the world. And yet he prays, Father, forgive them. He speaks directly to his heavenly Father.

Father, forgive them. And, of course, that's why the Lord Jesus Christ came. That's why the Lord Jesus Christ died. And his prayer was going to be wonderfully answered.

Now, we don't know specifically about all those round about, that soldier and that soldier, that member of the crowd, that person over there. We don't know specifically whether they ever turn to God and ask for forgiveness.

[20 : 08] But when Jesus was dying on the cross, he was purchasing forgiveness to be made available to all. Now, we need forgiveness, don't we?

We need forgiveness sometimes because we haven't been the mothers or the fathers that we should have been, or the wives or the husbands that we should have been, or the parents or the children that we should have been. Certainly we haven't lived as God's people in the way that we ought to have done.

We're, you know, we're told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Well, we don't do that, do we? We're told to love our neighbour as ourselves. Too often we're just selfish. We need forgiveness.

The Bible calls it sin. And I don't know any other way whereby the guilt of an accusing conscience can be dealt with, apart from forgiveness from God, because primarily all sin is first and foremost towards God, and then, of course, towards others.

Well, when Jesus died, your sin and mine, every bit of it, every wrong thought, every wrong word, every wrong deed, all that would condemn me to hell, God took and laid on Jesus, and he paid the penalty for my sin.

[21 : 20] Sin has eternal consequences, but he, the eternal one, paid for my sin. Isn't that wonderful? He loved us and he died for us. And Jesus is praying, Father, forgive them.

And then when he'd fully paid the price of sin and he took the weight of the world's sin on himself, he hung there in that darkness for those hours. At the very end, he said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

He gave himself over to death. It's true that people had the intention of killing Jesus, but actually he dismissed his spirit. He gave himself over to the Father. He is the one who says, and the way, the truth, and the life.

So he was in control of his life and he gave himself over to death. And it's a wonderful thing to be able to go through life and eventually, at the end, to be able to say, Father, I give myself over to you.

To be able to die in confidence that we're going to meet a heavenly Father, not to be judged, but going to meet a heavenly Father who will welcome us because we've been forgiven.

[22 : 22] I think they're beautiful prayers that the Lord Jesus Christ taught. So we've had the prayers of a mother, a very specific prayer. The prayers of this desperate man, Lord, save me.

The prayers of Jesus. Just another thought about short prayers. The prayers of various individual sinners. And I've got a couple here. And the first one is concerning a parable, a story that Jesus told.

And it was two men who went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee. They were the very strict religious people. And they not only tried to keep to God's law, but they invented hundreds of others that they said everybody had got to keep to as well.

And they loved their traditions, sadly, more than the commandments. And they were one of the groups of people that really hounded the Lord Jesus Christ. But a Pharisee went into the temple to pray.

You think, well, that's a worthy thing to do, surely. And he lifted up his head and his hands towards God. And he said, God, thank you that I'm not like other people.

[23 : 26] You can't imagine the audacity of a man praying like that. He said, I give, I pray, I fast. And then he saw a tax collector praying.

And he's still supposed to be talking to God. And he says, I thank you I'm not like him. You can't credit it, can you? And Jesus really said the man is just talking to himself.

This isn't prayer. Which one of us can come before a holy God who knows everything there is to know about us and say, God, thank you that I'm good.

No, we would run a mile, wouldn't we? We all know we've done wrong. And compared to the absolute perfection of God, I think we, I don't know, we want to call for the mountains to fall on us rather than face God with all our sin, wouldn't we?

But Jesus said there wasn't only this Pharisee praying, but there was a tax collector, a publican was the way they used in those days. Now, tax collectors were the lowest of the low.

[24 : 29] They had bought the right to tax and to extort money from their own people. So they were despised. But there he is. And he falls on his face before God.

And he says, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And that was it. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I don't know. It may have taken years for him to formulate that prayer, to recognise what he was like, how distant he was from God, how he deserved condemnation and judgement.

It took seconds to pray. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. What's that? Two, three seconds. But do you know, all eternity to enjoy the answer to that prayer and the response to that prayer.

Because the Lord God, you know, he loves, he's in a hurry to forgive men and women. It's marvellous. And when we come to him and simply say, Father, I've sinned before heaven and before you.

Would you just take me, make me? And he does. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And I'd like to ask you, do you mind being very blunt, very Yorkshireist, very specific?

[25 : 43] Have you ever come to a time in your life when you've asked the Lord Jesus to forgive you, to save you, to take away your sin and then by his Holy Spirit to come and live within you and to make you his and to help you to start to live for him day by day?

That's what a Christian is. It's somebody who's turned from their own wrong way and turned to trust Jesus Christ. The Bible calls it repenting and believing. And just one other example of somebody who prayed a very short prayer and he left it almost to the last moment.

It's the dying thief who was crucified next to the Lord Jesus. Remember, there were two thieves on either side. And I don't know how many minutes or hours they were away from death. Eventually, the Roman centurions were going to come beat and break the legs of those two thieves so that they wouldn't be able to hoist themselves up and gasp at breath anymore.

But before that, this man who began with his partner in crime on the other side of Jesus, who began by cursing and swearing, turned to Jesus and prayed a prayer.

Now, we know what had been going on in his mind because he spoke, first of all, to his friend on the other side. He'd begun to think about God because he said, do not fear God, because he was just swearing and cursing.

[26 : 58] And he thought about his own sin because he said, do not fear God, seeing we also are in the same condemnation and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds. And then he thought about Christ and he said, but this man has done nothing wrong.

And then he turned to Jesus. It's interesting because at the foot of the cross was Mary and at the foot of the cross as well was John, St. John, the disciple. But he didn't go via them to get to Jesus.

He went directly to the Lord Jesus. And we may do the same. And he simply said, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. That was it. He couldn't offer Jesus any money.

Probably stolen anyway by this guy. And this is Jesus who made all the wealth that there is in the world. And anyway, they're dying. He couldn't say from now on, I'll try to be good.

I'll turn over a new leaf because, hey, yes, he's dying. All he could do was say, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. All he could do was cast himself on the mercy of Jesus. And Jesus turned to him and said, today you'll be with me in paradise.

[28 : 03] What an amazing thought. A few moments earlier, he said, this guy said we deserve capital punishment. And probably he thought I deserve hell as well. But Jesus promised him heaven.

Heaven is not a reward for doing good because none of us are good enough for heaven. Heaven is a gift which Jesus purchased and he offers to us.

If only we'll turn from that which is wrong and trust him. So I want to ask. Yes, I want to ask the mothers, of course. But fathers, parents, grandparents and grandchildren.

Yes, and all of you, I want to ask very specifically. Has there come a moment in your life when you've prayed, but not just prayed generally, which is a good thing to do, but prayed very specifically and said to the Lord Jesus Christ, please, would you forgive me?

Would you please become my Lord? Would you become my saviour? Would you become the person who is washing away all that's wrong and rotten about me and just taking over my life so that from now on I'll start to live for you day by day and walk with you?

[29 : 16] That's what a Christian is. It's interesting. Saul of Tarsus, who was one of those early Christians and probably the greatest Christian who's ever lived and spread the gospel throughout Europe and of course gave us a number of letters, little books in the New Testament.

When he was converted on the road to Damascus, he was taken, he was led because he was blinded. And a man called Ananias was sent to go and help him spiritually to get him on his feet again.

And Ananias said, my Lord, he's such a bad man. He's been persecuted Christians and he had been indeed. And God said to him, to Ananias, look, Saul, behold, he prays.

The sign that a person has got right with God is they start to pray. They start to want to talk to the Lord. And of course, God speaks to us through his word and through, you know, we hear his word preached, etc.

And we begin to walk with him, converse with him, get to know him. Behold, he prays. And that spiritual life begins when we pray and say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[30 : 26] Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Shall we have a prayer that you could pray with me? It's a prayer I prayed when I became a Christian quite some years ago now.

Why don't you make this prayer your prayer, sort of personalise it, echo it with me? Dear God, you know everything there is to know about me. I want to say I am sorry for my sin.

And with your help, please, I want to turn from it. I do believe Jesus died for me and rose from the dead. Please forgive me.

Come and live within me. And may the risen, living Jesus become my Lord and my Saviour as I start to follow him. For I pray in his name.

Amen. Amen. Well, God bless you and have a very, very happy Mother's Day.