

Church Weekend - Session 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 June 2018

Preacher: Nick Page

[0 : 00] So we're going to look at the final part of this sort of jigsaw of discipleship really this afternoon. And we've looked at the invitation to abundant life that's there.

We looked at these questions about God and the idea that unless we get our view of God right, he won't be someone we want naturally to spend time with. And how often other people's views of God, the things that we think are just our, really our views as well.

It's just we don't express that. So that we might end up saying exactly the same thing. And we look at these three really important points that you just need to take away with you.

God really, really loves you. I think part of the problem with this is that our, there's a few things that I want to pick up on. Part of the problem is that we don't have, we talk about the Trinity, but we don't really believe in the Trinity.

And Trinity is exactly hard to get our heads around. Okay, the idea that there's one God in three persons is kind of tough. And, you know, in the early church, I've written the histories of this period, there's massive arguments about how this actually worked out.

[1 : 16] And typically for Christians, arguments that involved people ending up behaving in very un-Christ-like and un-Trinitarian ways. I think a functional thing is that we must remember that when we see Jesus, what we see in Jesus is God.

As my friend Trevor says, Jesus does God perfectly. And that's the fundamental thing. The actions of Jesus are the actions of God. God, I have come so that you may know the Father, he says.

All who have seen me have seen the Father. And that's pretty mind-blowing, really, when you think about it. Because what we tend to do is we tend to have a view of God, the Trinitarian God, so three things.

That is, as my mate Joe says, a bit vague. Father, son, and floaty thing, he calls it. Without wanting to be disrespectful. But we don't have a proper theology in the sense of understanding of what the Holy Spirit does in our lives.

And again, it's not easy, but we can get some basic understanding of that. But we also don't, we think there's this massive difference. So it's like, I feel like good cop, bad cop. Sometimes we think that basically there's God with his smiting button wanting to do the tough things.

[2 : 26] And Jesus is the one who's administering the sort of calming down measures. You know, he's going, no, no, no, Dad, no, don't do that. It's not that case at all. A former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, said this.

He said, God is Christ-like, and in him there is no un-Christ-likeness at all. I'm going to repeat that because it's a thing you need to think about.

God is Christ-like, and in him there is no un-Christ-likeness at all. What that means is when we see Jesus operating in the scriptures, it's God doing it.

When Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, that is God washing the feet of the disciples. That's a pretty awesome thing. That's a pretty awesome thing.

But they're not two different types of character in that sense. Now that in a sense creates some, I know it creates some issues in our lives. But I just want to get that over. I think we have to understand that.

[3 : 27] And we are, you know, God has loved us into being. We are made in love, by love, for love. That's what we're about. In this session we're going to be looking at some perhaps more personal aspects of that.

Because I think one of the things is that even when we get to this point, one of the things in my life, even when I get to the idea that God is love and that God loves me, I can still struggle. Because I'm not sure I believe that I'm lovable.

I think that God might look at me as that. But I struggle sometimes to accept that God finds me acceptable, finds me lovable. And I just want to major in on that.

I like collecting signs from around the world that are perhaps not amazingly translated. But are quite fun.

We are going to be looking at the private parts of our lives, basically.

[4 : 38] And we need to have that courage to sort of open them up. Oh no, that's gone terribly. Anyway, the thing is... I want to talk about honesty. Being honest. Being really honest.

I mean, sometimes you can be over-honest. Here we go. Here we go. And just accepting that actually all of us are both fearfully and wonderfully made and also incredibly stupid and strange and quirky and odd.

This is, you know, one of my favourite of those signs. We are all of us on the beach of irregular bottoms, everybody.

You know, there's nobody perfect. And we get this thing I talked about earlier with social media where we're constantly sort of looking at other people's lives and thinking that's what their life is like all the time.

Understanding words, people present a curated version of themselves. A version of themselves that is presentable. You know. And Instagram and things like that are full of...

[5 : 48] If you do that kind of stuff, are full of that kind of stuff where you're always taking a picture of the glorious time that you're having. All right. Well, you know, there are plenty of times when the picture would be very, very different.

I wonder what your story is. I've heard a few people's stories as I've been here. Where they've come from. What's happened to them, good or bad in their life. Their experiences. As a writer, I think stories have a certain shape.

You know, not all stories, but they do often fall into a kind of clear shape, really. Starts with a call. The hero is called into action.

All right. Frodo is called to take the ring to Mordor. And for some reason, I've never fathomed, you can't just fly it there on an eagle. Apparently they only fly back from Mordor.

They don't deliver. Anyway, so you have to... Frodo's called to deliver the ring to Mordor. James Bond has got a phone call to go and deal with this villain. And the first thing you have to do is answer that call. And then there's a rise.

[6 : 53] So there's a few challenges, but they overcome that. There are difficulties, but they keep going. You know, Bond meets a few minor henchmen and kills them off.

But he's getting there. But they're making progress. They're rising. They're on the rise. And then the most crucial part, the most important part of the story, the fall. That point where everything seems lost.

Where there is no hope. They're not going to deliver this. They're not going to... They're going to die before they get anywhere near that big mountain in Mordor. Bond is strapped on an operating table or something with a laser pointing at issues in his past.

And he's just going to get... There's no way out. And then the final part, the surprise. Call, rise, fall, surprise. The surprise.

The bit where it suddenly all turns around. The twist. Where Bond presses a button on his watch and it turns into a nuclear submarine. And, you know, everything is fantastic. The sudden surprise.

[7 : 56] The twist. The change. The change. In fact, talking of Tolkien. Tolkien said that the most important part of this... Of the story is the fall.

He coined a term for it. He called it a eucatastrophe. Spelt EU catastrophe. I'm going to just leave that. Because it could go either way, that one. But he was writing a long time ago.

EU, Greek, EU meaning good. Catastrophe meaning downturn. The good downturn. Downstroke. Because it's in the downturn. It's in the fall that the hero discovers who they truly are.

Discover something about themselves that they didn't know. And the fall is massively important in our lives. I wonder where you are in this story, if you're in this story at the moment.

Church, for example, is pretty good at the first two parts of the story. It's great at calling us. Calling us. And we follow the call. We answer the call.

[8 : 59] And then it's the rise where we just absorb everything from church. We're really keen. You know, services. Yes. Give us more. Prayer meetings. Home groups. I'm consuming everything.

Just like a caterpillar. I'm just eating my way through it. But then there's the fall. There's the thing where everything falls apart. And as the classical writers call it, the spiritual writers call it, the dark night of the soul descends.

Where we think we've lost everything. And sometimes I think as Christians we can't cope with that. We don't know what to do. We don't know what to say. We really mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that the abundant life is all about success in the world's terms.

If you read in the Old Testament, this is something they could never quite get their head around. They had a huge amount of struggle because the Jewish, the Hebrew kind of idea was that God's blessing on you was in abundance.

Was in abundance of possessions. Abundance of wealth and luxury and all this kind of thing. That's how God. And then they realized that actually it doesn't quite work that way. In the Psalms you can almost trace this trajectory.

[10:13] There was various Psalms where at the first it's saying, you know, oh look there are evil people and they seem to have an abundance but we know it's going to get taken away from them. And then later on there's a Psalm that goes, oh look there are evil people and it doesn't seem to be being taken away from them in this life and they don't seem too worried about it.

But I think in the end it will get taken away from them somehow. And then there's a Psalm later on saying, actually you know what I said earlier about the taking, I'm not sure that works anymore. And it doesn't seem to be, I'm going to trust that after death something gets taken away from them and they gradually develop this idea of judgment. And then the final kind of sets of Psalms are going, I don't know. I don't know what happens.

I just think it's a good thing to follow God with all its consequences. And so, you know, the fall, this thing that happens in our lives are moments in fact of deep importance.

They are not blips to be got over. They are not just bumps in the road and then we'll resume our sedate route. They are things that change you.

[11:20] And if we are following the Christ-like pattern, they change us in ways that surprise. And can be even blessings and joyous.

My own psychological issues such as they are, they're not major. But, you know, have been a source of real importance in my life.

I had one moment really some time back where, in 2010, where it was a tiny little thing. I was due to go and speak at Spring Harvest.

They have a holiday camp in France called Le Pass Optum. It's a great gig. You go, you're the only speaker on site. And you can talk about what you know, which is quite good for any Christian conference, really, rather than what they want you to talk about, which is things you're one page ahead of the manual on.

You know, so you go and you spend a lot of time with people. The food's good. The wine's good. And the weather's better than Minehead or Skegness by about a million percent. And it was due to go out on the Monday and the Thursday before I lost, I discovered I couldn't find my passport.

[12:31] I'd completely lost it. And now it's not, you know, in human scale of things, this is a very tiny thing. And yet it completely shattered me. It completely broke me.

And I lay on the bed for the rest of the past a few days just sobbing. And my wife, you know, wonderful woman, just picked me up and took me to the doctor. And the doctor was using words like depression and things like that and burnout.

And I think it's ridiculous. And, you know, what it was, what it was in my life was an amazingly blessed flesh wound, really. Because it taught us so close to the edge.

So close to the edge of a much more major sort of breakdown. And I phoned, I remember, I phoned the amazingly inaccurately named Government Passport and Identity Helpline.

And they said, oh, no, we can't. Oh, no, if you've lost it, it's like being stolen. You have to do a complete new application. You have to get your parents' details. I got all this stuff. So I had to go get my birth certificates and all the parents' birth certificates.

[13:40] And they said, oh, you can't get the rapid one, I'm afraid. You can't get the express one because they don't do it for new applications, so you can't do that. And they said, it's no good going early to the appointment. I had to book an appointment in Peterborough.

That's how much I sacrificed to go to Peterborough. And I said, no good going early because, you know, it won't get in early. Anyway, I managed to get this appointment at Peterborough. And we

went early because I was paranoid about missing it.

And, of course, we went straight in. And we went straight up to the desk early. And this 14-year-old behind the desk looked at me. And I said, I've got all these documentations.

She said, what are you bought that for? I said, well, I was tired. She said, no, I don't need all that. And she pressed a button. She typed a few things in. She said, oh, yes, there you are. And then she looked up at me.

She said, oh, you look old. Which I thought was rubbing it in. And then she said, oh, if you'd come here a bit earlier, we could have done you the express service. Anyway, but amazingly, no, let's be thankful.

[14:43] I got the passport. I got it picked up the next day. I drove to the Vendée in France, which is via the Channel Tunnel, which is not the best route. Arrived at midnight. Delivered the week. But I want you to understand, it's not a big thing in the scheme of things.

If I hadn't gone, the world would carry on turning. People would have had a great holiday. Possibly a better time than if I'd been there teaching them. You know, no. It was a joke. I don't really believe that. But, you know, it would have been fine.

But what I recognised in it was the fragility of where I'd got to. And the mask that I'd been wearing for so long. Of being, you know, this guy who's got it together.

Look at me. I'm a writer. I'm a Christian speaker. I'm on the rise. So do not despise the falls and the failures in your life. There are four great teachers in our lives, I think.

Four great teachers. And they are loss and fear and failure and doubt. And these are the things we learn more from than any number of sermons or books.

[15:49] They are the things in our life that will teach us the deepest, hardest, but most important truths. And as a community of disciples together, we have to help people with those.

To listen to people during those. To accept people. And to learn with them what's happening in their lives. And to journey with them. Call, rise, fall, surprise.

Where are you in this story? Let's... When am I going to, Matt, by the way, with this session? What time do you want me to... Before you want. Okay, terrific. Well, I would be here at six.

That's great. Let me just get some water. I wonder where you are in this journey. Perhaps some of you are on the rise. Perhaps things are going superbly for you.

Couldn't be happier for you. No, you know. No, we're all at different points, aren't we? So some people are the cool, the right. Some people have just answered the cool, the new, the fresh.

[16:51] And it's all exciting. That's a brilliant period to be in. Love that moment. Some people are on the rise. And maybe you won't. I'm not saying everybody has to go through this by any means. You know, but I think it is a common pattern.

Maybe for some of you, you are in the fall right now. You have fallen. Things have gone wrong. I want to tell you, things can be redeemed.

Let's look very quickly at a story in the Bible. We'll go back to that first chapter of John, which we just touched on this morning with the disciples being asked by Jesus, you know, what are you looking for?

It follows on from that. So these two disciples go down, spend some time with Jesus. And John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 40, says this, starting at verse 40. It says, It's a very familiar story.

You know, Jesus renaming Peter. Now, names matter quite a lot in the ancient world. And normally, if you rename something, it's a sense of ownership over it.

[18:20] So often you would rename a slave. So you buy a slave at auction, for example, and normally they're foreign because they've been captured in some war or something.

And so you wouldn't be able to pronounce their name anyway. And you wouldn't care. So you give them another name. Because I am now in charge with you. So you have slaves in the Bible who are renamed. Hagar, for example, in the Old Testament.

It's not her real name. That's a slave's name that she's given. I mean, in the New Testament, you have various slaves. And often they were named either for the family.

So, you know, maybe named after the family name. Or they'd be given a name that was their characteristic. Sum something up about them. So we have Anisimus, who's Anisiphorus.

Anisiphorus? Who's the one in Philemon?

Anyway, him. I've done my research. I just can't remember it. Which means useful. His name is useful.

[19 : 17] And my favourite one is in Acts 17, in the story of the meeting at the church at Troas, where Paul is speaking in Troas, and they're having a conversation late at night. And it's very, they're up to the third story of this apartment building, basically, in Troas.

And the guy falls out the window. Do you remember? Because it's so hot and it's so late. Now, the reason he falls out the window is not, it's always said because it's boring. It's not because it's boring. It's because he's tired. He's a slave. He's been working all day. They don't have a Sabbath. Nobody had a Sunday off for the first three centuries of the Christian church. There was no Sunday in that sense. It wasn't a day off. It was a normal day. So they're meeting late at night because that's the only time that Christians can meet.

It's hot. They're in the top floor of this place. It's full of the smoke from the lamps. And he falls out the window and dies. Hits the floor. Paul goes down. He comes back to life. And his name is Eutychus. And Eutychus means lucky.

I love that. So, you know, slaves' names. You get given a name. Now, what's happening here? Jesus is giving Simon a new name. We sort of lose the impact of it because we're now used to people being called Peter.

[20 : 25] It's a common name. Lots of people are called Peter. It wasn't a name in those times. There was nobody called Peter. It's a noun which means rock, stones. It's like as if I was to say, you are called Matt, but I'm going to call you Chair.

You go, well, that's not a name. Why are you doing that? Peter, he's called Kephas because of the qualities. I think Jesus is calling him into who he's going to be.

Who he's going to be. You are going to be a rock. You're going to be a rock. And Peter answers this call. And so you see this rise. And when he does become that kind of person, he becomes the main man of the disciples.

He's the one. He's the strong man. He thinks that's what it means. You know, the rock call is, I'm going to be the strong man here. And he's the one who always does the thing. He'll answer all the questions and he'll get out of the boat and try and walk on the water when nobody else wants to give it a go.

And he manages it for a bit. And he's always, he's there. He's going to act out this part. He is the strong man. And there's this rise. And then, of course, as we all know in the shape of the story, the fall, Gethsemane, the garden.

[21 : 38] Even then, he's being the strong man with the sword. So he pulls the sword out, chops the guy's ear off. Jesus heals him. And tells him, put away the sword. So he's fighting back. But then Jesus is taken.

Peter, even then, is the strong man. He follows Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. To do that takes amazing courage. It really does. Because houses in first century Jerusalem were not like we have now in this salubrious area.

You know, where you might have a big mansion, I imagine, out there. It's full of them. And with gates. And it's all open at the front. No, they were kind of like a door in a wall. And then you went through that and down into a courtyard.

It then opened out. But the initial entrance is very strongly, you know, it's very forbidding. And Peter does that. He goes down into the courtyard. Into a place where he knows could be fatal to him. Then there's the fall. Then there's the bit where he's challenged and he denies ever having met Jesus. That's the fall.

[22 : 41] Call, rise, fall. Well, where was the surprise? Well, I think there's a number of surprises in Peter's life. Obviously, I think the resurrection, kind of major surprise moment for him.

But I'm not sure if that was really the totality of the surprise. Because, you know, Peter knows that Jesus knows what he's done. Peter knows that Jesus knows that he's betrayed him.

So, you know, great, he's back. But he's got to face that. I think the surprise for Peter was that moment on the beach in Galilee. Where Jesus asked him three times, do you love me?

Now, we could talk a lot about that because there's different Greek words used for the word love and Jesus keeps bringing it down to the level that Peter can actually commit to, in fact. But, leaving aside that bit, that's the moment of redemption.

That's the moment when Peter knows that he's loved. He's back. It's okay. And I think it frees Peter to become who he truly is in an entirely new way.

[23 : 46] Because he does become the rock of the church, but not in the way that you understand it. Peter is never the leader of the early church. He's in no position of leadership apart from the really early days where, in fact, he does some things that just don't sort of stick or work, like electing a new disciple, a new apostle.

That doesn't seem to kind of go anywhere. But he's never the leader in that sense. James is the leader of the first church in Jerusalem. Peter, as far as we know, never led a church. He wasn't the leader of the church in Rome.

He never was that. And yet, he was the rock in so many other ways. One of the ways was that he knew he could be honest. Where does that story of Peter in the courtyard come from, except from him?

It's nowhere else that could come from. Who else knew that? Nobody else knew that. But because of who he is, because of Jesus bringing him back, he knows he has the strength to tell that story and in doing so, encourage all of us who fail Jesus at one point or another to know that there is always redemption, there is always a way back, there is always a calling back.

He becomes the rock in an entirely new way. I think it's really important. In fact, there are these links, you see. In John's Gospel, the Greek, there's a Greek word for charcoal fire, charcoal, you know, brazier that they're gathered around.

[25 : 04] And the word is anthraki, anthrakiah, and John uses it twice in the entire Gospel. Once in the courtyard of the high priest's house and once on the beach in Galilee where Jesus is cooking fish.

Those are the points that Peter links. Those are the, that's the link John wants us to make, that Peter is brought back. He has to recognise his failure. He has to come to terms with it.

But he goes on to become the rock in a whole new way. So the fall reveals the truth but it also can propel us into an entirely new way of being with God, an entirely new way of following Jesus.

It doesn't get rid of the wounds. I want to say that quite clearly. It's not that the past is wiped out. Jesus, when he's resurrected, still has wounds.

He still has the mark. What it is, is that the past can be transfigured, transformed, and changed utterly into something different.

[26 : 16] It's very hard to face at points because our sense of who we are is so bound up in things that we have or jobs that we do quite often.

And when those moments come, that's very hard for us to face. I talk with a lot of guys who have been made redundant. And that's very hard if your whole life has been bound up in the work and your whole value, the way you look at yourself is bound up in that work and then suddenly that work is taken away from you.

Who am I? And the way we talk about our work is so significant, isn't it? We say, you know, in the few parties that I get invited to, I go if there's a buffet, you know, I'm a writer, I've got to get my nourishment somehow.

You know, the way we talk to people is we, I say to people, you know, what do you do? People say to me, what do you do? And that, really, when they ask you the question, the correct way of answering that is say, well, what do I do when?

I mean, I do lots of things. Sometimes I write, sometimes I lie on the sofa scratching myself. It's a toss-up. Each day could go in each direction. We're not really sure at the beginning of the day how it's going to pan out.

[27 : 22] Sometimes I do that thing that only men can do, which is standing, thinking of absolutely nothing. Where was I? Anyway, you know, sometimes I do all kinds of things.

What do we do? We actually say, oh, I'm a writer. I'm a lawyer. I'm a teacher. I am this. I'm a nurse. I'm a doctor. I'm a... We turn what we do into what we are. I am.

I am this. And it becomes our sense of identity when that's taken away from us in the fall. That's really hard, but that's where we find out who we truly are. And Jesus is absolutely concerned with who we truly are.

I just want to quickly, I won't stretch this out, I want to quickly look at one more story here. In Mark, chapter 5, there's the story of the man who is, the Gerasene demoniac is its name.

He's consumed with demons. I won't read the whole story because it's a long story. But Jesus goes across Galilee to a Gentile area, the Decapolis that I was talking about earlier, and he meets a man who lives in the tombs.

[28 : 32] He lives amongst the tombs. It says here, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain. For he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart and the shackles he broke in pieces and no one had the strength to subdue him.

Night and day was among the tombs and on the mountains he was howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him and he shouted at the top of his voice, What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God. Do not torment me. For Jesus had said to him, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. Then Jesus asked him, What is your name?

And he replied, My name is Legion, for we are many. He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. And anyway, you know how the story goes on. Jesus, there's a big herd of, this is how we know it's a Gentile area, a big herd of pigs there.

Legion is cast into the pigs. The pigs charge into the sea. There's lots of, into the lake, there's lots of stuff there. But, let's look at just a little bit of context in that.

[29 : 42] The first thing is, the Jewish world, the first century, was a binary world. It was pure and, everything was pure and impure. And if you're not, you know, you have to be one or the other.

This man is ritually impure for a number of reasons. He's got a demon, that's why Mark calls it an impure demon. So the demon made him impure to start with. He's living among the tombs. There was a thing called corpse impurity, which meant if you touched a corpse, or you lived near corpses, you would be impure as well.

And so, to be impure means that he can never be part of the community. You cannot go into synagogue, because you could catch impurity from people. So, so he's, he's ostracized, he's alone, he's out there, and of course, he's stuck in this howling, despair, of all the stuff that is going on, in his life.

The voices of the demons in his head. Now, exorcism in the first century, was a common thing.

Jesus was by far, not the only person, to, to do this kind of thing. And what you had to do, was you had to do a number of things.

Firstly, you had to, you could use amulets, or spells. There were lots of different techniques, around for getting rid of a demon. And, one of the key things, that he had to do in it, was to find out the demon's name.

[30 : 51] Now, one of the interesting things about Jesus, is that he, he never really does this.

When you read the other accounts, of his exorcisms, he just says, come out. And it was one of the things, that was remarked on.

People said, where did he get this power? Because he doesn't bother with the amulets, he doesn't bother with the spells, he doesn't even bother finding out, what he's dealing with. He just says, come out, get out. Get out. And the word, the Greek word is ekballo, which literally, means to throw out.

Get out, you're chucked. Get out, go, move. He never bothers to ask, who the demon is. And yet, this is the only time, when he asks, for a name.

Why is he doing that? I don't think he's talking, to the demon at all. I don't think he's interested, in who the demon is. Sure, the demon answers. But I think he's asking the man.

He's saying, what is your name? What is your name? Who are you? I know you're in there. I know you're in there, in the noise, and the fear, and the anger, and the self-hatred, that's going on.

[31 : 55] You are in there. Who are you? Come on. Come out. Jesus is absolutely concerned, with who we are.

Who we truly are. And he calls us into that. Even in the times, when we think we have fallen, so far, that there's no coming back. We think we have fallen, so far, that we are almost possessed, by something else.

There is no coming back. And Jesus looks at you, and says, who are you? What's your name? I wonder what you would answer, that question.

Jesus asks you, what's your name? What answer do you give him? We give ourselves all kinds of names. We tell ourselves all kinds of stories, about ourselves. We give ourselves the names of fear, and failure.

We give ourselves the names of unloved. We give ourselves the names of ugly, or fat. We give ourselves the names of old. It's a great exercise, to ask yourself, maybe this is something we can

think about.

[33 : 00] You know, you know, what name, what name do we give ourselves, and what name does Jesus give us? Because I don't think they'd be the same name. I often do this exercise, we did this exercise with, when I was on this, I did a two year spiritual formation course, and, and, it's fascinating, because, we looked at, one of the texts we looked at, was Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

I don't know if anyone remembers that old, old favourite. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, is an allegory. So every character in it, has a name that's, that's part of their characteristic. There's faithful, and there's, you know, Christian, and there's giant despair.

And you had to say to yourself, if you were a character in Bunyan, what name would you give yourself? What name would you give yourself? And I kind of, came up with, Mr. Must Be Right. Mr. I've got to know more, than the next person. I've got to, I've got to be right. Um, but the name we give ourselves, is not, I think, the name that Jesus gives us.

The name that, he calls us. And one of the great things, we can do for one another, and this is what I'd like to think about now, is, to recognise the great qualities, that each person has.

[34 : 14] And say, what name would I give you? What name would I give you? What would I call you? And maybe that's something you need to tell people, over the course of this weekend.

To say to you, I think you are Miss Encouragement. Not Miss Encouragement, that sounds bad, doesn't it? Miss, that sounds like you're not, that sounds like, that sounds like you're encouraging people, in entirely the wrong way. Miss Encouragement.

You know, I think you're Mr. Hope. I think, I think, I think you're Mr. Wisdom. I think you, I think you're Mrs. This, That. Do you see what I mean? You know, say to people, who are you?

As friends, we know each other, and we need to be encouraging one another, saying, you think you're one thing, but you're not. You're not. You're something else. Who are you?

There's much more we could say, but I'm running out of time. Sorry. Um, Jesus calls us, amidst the turmoil of our lives, and the despair, to say, who, who are you?

[35 : 16] I know you're in there. Come on. Follow me. We are not, what we think we are.

We are not our jobs. We are not our possessions. We are not our possessions. We are not our wounds. The things that have been done to us.

We're not those. We're not our failures, and we're not our successes either. We're not our history, although our history is bound up with that, because our history can be transfigured.

We are. Who are we? We are sons and daughters of God. We are loved and cherished by God. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We are disciples of Jesus.

That's good enough. That's good enough. And it enables us to be honest. I was chatting to Matt outside earlier, and about, you know, speaking of what happens now, and I said, the only thing that's really changed for me, is that I just, I suddenly realised that, I spent so much of my life worrying about what people thought of me.

[36 : 32] I was in a meeting, I can't tell you the full story now, but I was in a meeting, and I didn't know what I was doing there, why I'd gone there. It was the other side of the Atlantic. I ended up there. All kinds of stuff was happening at home. My father was dying, various stuff.

I ended up in this place, and I was going, God, why am I here? And then the very first words of this meeting, a man who's taught me more than probably any other man in my life, stood up and he said, I was asking, a friend asked what he could pray for me as I leave this course, and he said, so I asked him if I could just put down the burden of impression management.

Help me put down the burden of impression management. And it sounds, again, it doesn't sound much, but I just went, oh. Because for 20 years I've been doing that. Managing what people think of me.

Coming to church, managing what people think of me. Going into a speaking engagement. Managing what people's impressions of me. All the time. Managing. And I was so tired of doing that. So I just thought, I'm going to try honesty. It seems so much easier. You know? It just seems so much easier. And so that's what I try and do. Honesty. I think we need two things together.

[37 : 36] We need honesty and courage. Honesty. The courage just to be ourselves, and the honesty to show ourselves as we truly are. And knowing that we're loved by God. Knowing that we're loved by one another. To be able to do that. I want to show you a film, just to end.

If I can get it to work. We haven't tried this, so let's hope that this all goes smoothly. And that I don't ruin the sound system again, as I managed to do earlier. It's a film about a man called Ed Dobson.

And he was a very, very successful pastor in North America. And he contracted what he calls in the film ALS, what we know as motor neurone disease.

So it's a terrible disease. It's a gradual wasting condition. And I think it's a very powerful film about how the fall can lead us into entirely new areas of our lives.

So are we ready to see if this actually works? This will be remarkable. I would say that as a pastor, I love everything.

[39 : 03] I love teaching. I love weddings. I love baptisms. I even love board meetings. In college, I wanted to be a surgeon.

But halfway through, God spoke to me about being a pastor. And so I switched from chemistry to Bible.

Everything I did as a pastor, I felt I was doing what God called me to do.

I knew that ALS would force me to quit. And I knew ultimately it would take my voice.

So I told God, if you take my voice, it's okay with me. I ended up continuing as a pastor for five years.

[40 : 20] And the head of the clinic where I went told me, look, you need to quit as soon as possible.

So I came back that weekend and announced I was quitting. It felt like all of a sudden, life had come to an end.

Life was over. It's going from 100 miles an hour to zero overnight.

I had a cell phone. And I kept saying, I'm going to go throw it in the Grand River because it rings constantly.

And the day after, it didn't ring all day. And I ended up calling Lorna to have her call me to make sure it worked.

[41 : 33] It worked. But nobody called. When you're not needed, you lose part of your purpose in life.

I think it hit me the day after when I came out to my office to study.

And normally, every Monday, I would open the books and prepare for the next Sunday. And that day, I had nothing to do.

No books to open. No passage to study. Nowhere to preach. I felt lost.

I think I'd lost my identity. My prayer, and I hope your prayer for me, will be that it will stay in one limb or that God will choose to reverse the process.

[43 : 00] Since I was no longer a pastor, I wasn't obligated to live within any boundaries. eventually, I settled on the idea of trying to live like Jesus.

So I went to the synagogue, ate kosher, observed all the feasts and festivals. I tried to think like Jesus.

I simply intended to try it for one year. From the bars to the polls, this Jesus follower brought controversy to a national level.

Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. Right. That year, I found a compelling purpose that helped me get up every day.

the paradox is that for me, the purpose was following Jesus, which I'd been trying to do all my life.

[44 : 19] Previously, I never had time to do it. I was so busy preaching, leading, serving, working.

I mean, I tried, but not to that extent. I never thought that my speaking and writing and living would come to an end.

Once I realized it's getting close to the end, then you begin to realize how fragile life is and you only do the things that are important.

I think humans have this capacity to think they'll live forever. forever. You ain't living forever.

So, what can I do with the limited time I have to make a difference? God's life is when God created the world, he placed Adam and Eve in the garden and said, take care of it.

[45 : 59] And the verb translated to take care is also translated as worship. God's life is so part of the way we worship God is by serving and taking care of the garden.

My garden today is meeting with individual people and helping them in their journey. When I was at Calvary, I preached to thousands of people every week.

Today, it's one-on-one primarily. And my struggle is you would think that influencing thousands is more important than influencing one.

But I'm gradually learning that influence one-on-one is way more important. ALS forced me into a situation where I grew in understanding what it meant to obey Jesus.

It took me quite a while to find an alternative purpose. But the good news is out there, there is a purpose for everyone.

[47 : 59] And when you arrive there, you'll know it. I love that video.

I've watched it so many times. I love it because it's all about resurrection, isn't it? The whole of our faith is about resurrection, about new life.

And there's a quote from Rowan Williams that I like. He says, the resurrection is not about the wiping out of our history, pain or failure.

It's about how pain and failure themselves, humanity marked by history, may yet be transfigured and made beautiful. people. I think what I'd like to do now, the last few minutes, is perhaps if we could pray together and maybe just think of that question.

That question I ask is, what's the name you give yourself? What do you call yourself? How do you label yourself? And perhaps speaking in just twos and threes, we can maybe tease that out, share that, and pray with one another.

[49 : 12] Perhaps someone within that group will say, well I don't think you're that at all, I think you're this. Or perhaps people will pray, we can pray that a new name is given, perhaps people will know the name that they want, what they want to be, but I just pray, I just think that's a good question to think about, what kinds of names do we call ourselves?

What do we think Jesus calls us? And let's just pray with each other and help each other through to that moment. Just share with the people where you are in your life. I think if we'll sort of move out of there, but this is a time to pray together, to share with each other, is that okay?

So let's just do that. Thank you. Do keep praying and maybe keep asking God to let you know if there's something, a word of encouragement you need to be giving to somebody.

Keep praying with them, things that have been shared, take those away. I wanted to just close today by just to show you this picture. which is a very meaningful picture for me.

It kind of sums up what we're talking about and what really the start of the day with the song we were singing about heaven coming on earth and all this kind of stuff. This is a picture that's in the Louvre museum in Paris, I have to say that carefully in case you think it's a toilet.

[50 : 38] It's an icon from the 6th or 5th century from Egypt. it shows a picture of Jesus, you can see Jesus on the right there, and a man called Abomenes, Father Manus, Abba means Abba, father of the monastery.

So he's unknown, we don't really know much about him, anything, but he's the head of the monastery. And there's several fascinating things about this picture. One is that Jesus is pretty much on the same level as Abomenes, together.

Jesus doesn't tower over him, I mean he's got a bigger hairdo slightly, but he's a younger man I think, but pretty much on the same level. Another interesting thing, because all icons have a certain language that tells you things about them.

You can see that there's something odd about Abomenes' eyes, if you look closely. You've got one eye going that way, and one eye going that way. And the reason is he's got one eye on Jesus and one eye on the world.

He's looking towards Jesus and out towards the world. And then Jesus is holding the scriptures, but he's got his arm around Abomenes. And if you look at Abomenes' hand, the right hand, he's holding it in the traditional iconographic way of showing blessing.

[52 : 04] Often you see Christ doing this, and pictures of Jesus in icons, he's doing that, he's giving a blessing. But you see, the thing is, Jesus can't do this in this picture, because he's got his arm around Abomenes. So the blessing of Jesus has to come through Abomenes to the world, and that.

And that's what discipleship is all about. It's about the blessing of Jesus coming through us to the world around us. Because I'd like to just move it one step further on, because we are disciples of Jesus Christ, but in John's Gospel, Jesus says, I no longer call you servants, because the servant doesn't know what his master's business is, I call you friends.

So yes, we are slaves of Jesus. Yes, we are disciples of Jesus. We're learning from him, but we're friends of Christ.

We're friends of Jesus, and through us, his blessing will flow out to the world. I'd like to pray for you now, and then we'll maybe have a song to finish.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for the people here, my friends and your friends. They're friends of you, and you are their friend.

[53 : 15] Lord, I pray that we would go from here with a real strong sense of your love and your friendship, your companionship on this journey. Lord, I ask that you would show people clearly the practices, the activities, the actions, the Christ-like behaviour that you want them to model.

maybe there's a particular area of their life that you want to challenge them to be more Christ-like in. Lord, I just ask that you would make that clear. I ask that for us as a community, there will be that interaction, that honesty, that understanding between us, that whatever stage of the story we're at, we are here for one another.

We will pray for one another. We will support one another. We will help each other in the business of becoming more like Jesus Christ. Lord, that is an activity, a business that can only be carried out through the presence of your Holy Spirit in our lives.

So send us the comforter, the encourager, the one who gives us that power to step out in your name. Lord God, you loved us into existence.

Help us to go from here and to so love this place that other people come to new life in you. Amen. Bye.

[54 : 33] Bye.