

A Fresh Start (audio includes a personal testimony)

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Preacher: Rev. Rico Tice

[0 : 00] Edie, we see you up the front here from time to time and where we hear you give announcements, but I wanted to ask you, have you always been a Christian? Were you always a Christian?

Oh heavens no, not for a long time was I a Christian. I thought I was. I always checked off Christian on all the forms I had to fill out and I actually was a good church lady and I even prayed, but I prayed to a God who was somewhere distant and shadowy.

So what brought you to the point of feeling that you needed something more or needed the Lord Jesus? Well I think to tell you that I have to begin by saying that I'm a product of a childhood.

My father was actually my high school principal and so much was expected of me. Standards were set for me that I really couldn't achieve, but I always, always wanted to have my daddy say, well done. And I never quite got that. Best marks in school, the best girl in school, graduated at 15, you name it, but I never quite got well done. And so I think that translated into my understanding of God, Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, and that began it. And then to go on to say, I entered into this cycle that Rico describes as goals, achievement, euphoria, and emptiness.

In my married life, in my business life, that was repeated over and over again. But I think I became aware of it. The night before I turned 25, I lay in bed, the mother of my second child, just my second child having been born. And I thought, I'm going to be 25 tomorrow. It's a quarter of a century. And is this all there is to life? I knew emptiness.

[2 : 02] But you, you did achieve. I mean, you pushed on, didn't you? I did. And how did, how did things come to a head for you around understanding who Jesus is?

Well, over the course of a few years, three different women had explained to me my need for Jesus. They saw in me this driven, achievement-oriented woman who searched for more all the time. And in 1986, I actually found myself in Vancouver, one of the commissioners of Expo 86. And it was an enviable position to be in. I had fully paid for apartment and car and unlimited expense account and a lot of prestige as the world would see it. But they didn't see inside that I was hollow and in despair.

So what happened? Well, one Sunday morning, the Sunday before the fair actually opened, I sat in my own apartment and said out loud, it's never going to be enough, is it? And, and all my years of striving to be good enough to get that well done from God, all of a sudden I realized I was never going to be good enough. But somehow that was okay. God wanted me. And I heard a voice on television actually talking about leading a woman to the Lord. And I said that prayer and it was, that's what happened.

Really? And, um, I asked two things of God from Matt. And one was, I asked him to change me if he was going to be real. I needed him to change me. And I said, I'll follow you anywhere, do anything you want me to do, but please let it make a difference.

[3 : 46] Hmm. So what, what is the biggest change? What has happened? Well, he's totally transformed not only my life, but me. He's transformed the way I think, the way I care about people, the way I see life. He's given me joy where there was just despair.

And as he said, if you've seen me, you've seen the father and I've come to love God with all my heart and soul and to see him as the God he truly is, full of acceptance and love and patience and kindness.

What would you say to people, uh, who are feeling, I can't have a fresh start. It's too difficult. Well, first I want to say, perhaps you think that being born again means entering into some kind of a weird

state of being in bondage. I thought that for a while. I thought if I came to the Lord Jesus that I was going to have to at least commit 10% of my high salary to, to God, all of it seemed like it wouldn't be free. What I found out it is utter freedom. And I want to tell you, it's not too late. If you're thinking that I've been around too long, I'm too guilty, I'm too full of, of bad things for God to accept me. I can tell you he is a God who's just waiting for you to say, that's a great story. Edie, thank you so much for sharing personally. Um, the, the, the song we're going to sing now finishes with the idea of God promising to set us free from fear and foe, that we might serve him all our days in goodness, love and peace. And we're grateful to you for sharing so honestly. And we, we're going to stand and sing this right now. Thank you.

Well, it's a great privilege to be here to speak today. I wonder if you could turn with me to page four of your handouts, the service sheets to John chapter three, the passage we had so well read for us. And that may be an unfamiliar experience for you to hear the Bible. I'm going to try and explain this passage and Christians believe that as the Bible is explained, God addresses us. So let's pray that that'll happen. That may be strange, but thank you for coming. And I hope that the Bible will speak to you profoundly. Let me say a prayer. Father God, thank you for the Bible. Please help me to explain it clearly and please address each one of us in the very depths of our being. And we ask this for our sake and indeed for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't know if you've ever played that game, if I had my life all over again. Of course, actually, you won't actually play that game unless you're 30, because if you're under 30, you think you're going to get your act together again. But certainly once you're 40 or over, which is very old, you begin to realize that you've had around half your life and certainly your body starts telling you that. So I find I now, I'm 40 one, have a furniture problem in that my chest is in my drawers nowadays. And you start to be wistful about the things you've not had a chance to do, maybe about decisions you've made. I read this quote from Martin Luther King. These were some reflections of his just before he died. He wrote this, shattered dreams are the hallmarks of our mortal lives. One of the most agonizing problems of our human experience is that few, if any of us, live to see our fondest hopes fulfilled. The hopes of our childhood and the promises of our mature years are unfinished symphonies. So you start saying to yourself, well, if I had my life all over again? Now, of course, there are some people who can't relate to this at all. I spoke to one person.

[7:27] They said, if I had my life all over again, I'd do exactly what I've done. Well, I thought that showed a singular lack of imagination. What do you want to do them again for? You've already done them once. Don't you want some new experiences? So for example, I'd love to have played rugby with the Maoris from the South Island of New Zealand or with the deeply Christian Western Samoans who are known as the heaviest tacklers in world rugby. Apparently their motto is Acts 20 verse 35. It's better to give than receive.

And I'd love to have learned to play the saxophone. The sax, I just think it's so cool. Or the bagpipes. There's a guy in the West End of London at Oxford Circus who plays the bagpipes. I think he is such a dude. I'd love to be able to do that. Or I'd love to have married that girl that I married to someone else. It was a disaster. I'd always dreamed of being two foot from her at the front of church and I was.

But in cricketing terms, I was at mid-off, not square leg. So that was the end of that. Or being a traveling salesman. Or played golf at Augusta. I'd love to do that. There's so many new experiences. I mean, I'd want to. Well, the trouble is it's only a game. It's a game. You can't start all over again. You can't. But the funny thing is, I don't know if you realize this, ladies and gentlemen, when it comes to the Christian faith, and what I mean by that is having a relationship with the God who made us, unless you do start again, you never make it. Unless you start again. And I wonder if you noticed that in the Bible reading that we had. It's there in front of us on page four. Can you see? In John's gospel here, Jesus is so uncompromising, so abrupt, so clear.

So verse three, do you see he says, I tell you the truth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he's born again. You've got to start again. Verse five, I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he's born of the spirit and the water. Unless is so categoric, isn't it? Unless there's rain, there are no crops. Unless you're born again, there's no Christianity, no relationship with the God who made us. Verse seven, you should not be surprised by my saying, verse seven, you must be born again. So Jesus is quite categoric here. A person cannot become a Christian unless he or she is born again. They cannot enter the Christian life unless they're born again. It's a fundamental of Christianity. Now at this point, I need to say that the phrase born again was not

invented by an American president so that he could get votes off Southern Baptists. I think that's what we think about it. Ronald Reagan, George Bush, they cooked it up for that reason. And it does not refer, can I say this again, to some narrow emotional cultic fringe type of Christianity which sensible people dismiss by saying, I'm a Christian but not one of those born again types. Ever heard people say that? I love my mother very much. It's just what she says.

And in fact, I devote this sermon to her for that reason. I'm a Christian but not one of those born again types. We do have some rows. Now this necessity of new birth is in the original articles of every single Protestant church. It's embedded in all the original Protestant creeds.

[10:34] It's a sincone known of Christian belief. It's fundamental. And if you've grown up, I don't know, perhaps Anglican, maybe you had a bit of Methodism, Baptist, I don't know. This doctrine was at your knee in the hymn book and the prayer book in the pew. It was there all the time. So it's not weird.

It is not strange. It's not new. And it is not, ladies and gentlemen, loony fringe. It is not. No, it's dynamite about a creator God who breaks into people's lives. And it's undetonated dynamite. And maybe it was at your knee all along when you were a little one in the prayer book. So please remove any unreflective prejudice you may have about the phrase. It's not bizarre for dogmatic crazy people. It's not an option. It's a necessity. And there could have been nobody who was more shocked to hear that he had to be born again than the man in verse 1. Can we see this man in verse 1? No one more shocked. A man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. You see, this man supposedly had all the right credentials to be accepted by God.

His performance was outstanding. There was so much to commend him. Surely he doesn't have to start over. Not this guy. I mean, verse 1, he's a Pharisee. That means he is an extremely disciplined man.

Secondly, he's an able man. He's on the Jewish ruling council. He's risen to the top of his nation, often by his good deeds. Verse 10, he's a learned man. You're Israel's teacher.

[12:13] Verse 2, I think this is great. He came at night to Jesus and he has a question. Rabbi, we know you're a teacher who's come from God, for no one could perform the reckless signs you're doing if you were not with him. And he comes and he says, well, you know, who are you?

So he's disciplined, able, learned, but he's also open. You know, there's some people, they stop asking questions. They're too proud. Some people stop doing that at 30 and they level off. Now, I have the answers. I don't ask questions. People ask me questions because I lead, because I've got the information. Do you know people like that? But this man is open and he's learning and he comes to ask a question of a man younger than him.

He's a thoroughly fine man. He'd have been honest in business, a law and order man. He'd have been a faithful husband, a church leader. He'd have been a diligent Bible reader. Your wife and your wallet would have been safe with him. And I mean, you actually don't get more moral than the Pharisees. They were fanatics on morality. They had a fetish on law keeping.

So you don't get anyone more moral, legalistic, upright and Rotarian than this man. He is the ultimate in what in the West End of London we'd call middle class respectability.

[13:24] He really is. And so he would have been deeply shaken when Jesus says to him, you need to be born again. It would have been a terrible shock that Jesus steps back and he draws a separating line between him and real relationship with God.

Now actually, when someone did that to me, when someone said to me that I needed to be born again, I knew that I was so self-obsessed that I thought, well, I bet I do. I could totally relate to Tennyson's words who cried out, oh, for a man to arise in me that the man I am should cease to be. I was in such a shambles. It never occurred to me that I didn't need to start again. But this is so thoroughly fine a man. He's a good man and he'd have been shaken when Jesus says, you must be born again.

So verse 4, do you see what happens? Verse 4. He says, surely a man cannot become a baby all over again. How can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again, be reborn? To which Jesus says, don't muck about.

He says, I'm not talking about physical things. I'm talking about spiritual things. Yes, you need to be born physically. Do you see verse 6? It's flesh gives birth to flesh, but you also need to be born spiritually.

[14:37] But the spirit gives birth to the spirit. And Nicodemus, all your religious credentials, Edie was the same, all those credentials, disciplined, religious, able, learned, moral, are not good enough.

Your own performance isn't good enough. And actually, Jesus then, you know, it's very striking as he calls him to be born again, this thoroughly good man. He then, in verse 18, says, all your performance won't stop you being condemned by God.

And now it gets very serious. He says in verse 36, all your performance won't stop God's anger settling on you. His controlled, settled, personal hostility to evil.

So Nicodemus, now this is staggering. All your performance won't save you from hell. That's what's at stake here. And we can therefore conclude, if a thoroughly good man like this needs to be born again, then you can be absolutely sure that you need to be born again, and I need to be born again. And there's this course, Christianity Explored, when you can check this out. But let me add, just to show what's at stake here, and please come and ask questions about this, but also, the kind Hindu needs to be born again, and the gentle Buddhist, and the moral atheist, and the fine Muslim.

[15:55] Jesus insists, whatever your cultural or religious background, whether you're from Vancouver or London, wherever you're from, he insists, you need to be born again. And the question is, why?

Why is that? Well, the Bible says, you see, that all of us, one way or another, perhaps we've done it very politely, have said no to God. No. We've said, we don't want you to be God over us.

That's what we've done. I was at college, where I got a third, by the way, actually. When I got my third, I said to my tutor, was I close to a 2-2, the next degree up? He said, no, Rico, it was a very solid third.

So I knew, ordination into the Church of England was the only career option available, so here I am. But when I got my third, I was at college with a guy called Andrew, and he had a little three-year-old daughter called Emily.

And one day, it was teeming with rain, and her father said, because of the rain, she couldn't go out. And she said, I don't like wet days. And Andrew, her dad, said, well, sometimes God makes it wet, and sometimes he makes it dry.

[16:54] To which his daughter, Emily, age three, replied, why doesn't God always do what I want him to do? That's the pinnacle, isn't it? But age three, why doesn't God be my servant?

And all of us, one way or another, have done that to God. We've said, no, God, I won't have you to run my life. Even Nicodemus has done it. We've pushed him out to the edge, and we've said, I'll be God.

I was catching a taxi in London recently, jumped in the taxi, and there was an advert on the flap seat in front of me, and it said this. It was Aer Lingus, the airline, and this was their advertisement. And it unashamedly appeals to our love of being number one. It said this. It's your company, it's your baby, it's your vision, and from time to time, it doesn't hurt to remind everyone of that.

That's why you fly Aer Lingus. So if you want to be late for a meeting, it's because you decide you want to be. And then a company chairman, and I don't know what the employees would have thought if they got in the taxi, maybe they didn't earn enough to get a taxi with him, but then he wrote underneath it, with name signed, if I'm late for a meeting, it's because I want them to know that I am the boss.

[18:06] And you know, as I read that, I couldn't help thinking of Deuteronomy chapter 8, which is the fifth book of the Bible. Moses is addressing the children of Israel as they head into the promised land, and if you're a business person, can I throw this verse out?

I used to have this on my desk when I worked at Hewlett-Packard. What do you make of this verse? This is what Moses said. You may say that my power and the strength of my hands have provided this wealth for me, but remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.

Some of my colleagues at Hewlett-Packard were quite upset by that verse, that reality. And you see, sin, that religious word, is that which presses us to put ourselves first.

So we spend our life saying, well, you know, it's my goals, my agenda, my desires, and I'll be the main character. God, thank you for the beauty of Vancouver. Thank you for filling my lungs with air, but now you get right down and you're a footnote.

And we've all done it, even Nicodemus. And here's the issue. When we do that, when we treat God like that, although to us, it may seem a very small thing, very small, actually the result is that we die in the spirit world and that we become spiritually walking corpses.

[19 : 25] That's what happens. And that's why there's this absolute necessity to be born again because we become spiritually dead because of our sin. Sin kills us.

And you know, there's such great strength in verse 7, isn't there? Can you see it? It's so great. Do you have a look down? Verse 7, and it's so emphatic. You must be born again. Not that you can be or should be or people like to be.

You must be. So what then, ladies and gentlemen, is the new birth? What does it mean to be born again? Well, can I begin by saying what it does not mean? It does not mean turning over a new leaf. It's not like going back on the diet. As you can see, mine is not going terribly well. On New Year's Day, I decided this year to give up all puddings except on my day off.

And then on my first day off, I had six. And it's not like that. It's not stealing yourself to turn over a new leaf. It's not that. No, this is a radical change that God does.

[20 : 22] And it's not something I do. It's a radical change that God does by the power of His Holy Spirit. The power that made the mountains around Vancouver is unleashed in us.

That's what the Bible says. It's a radical change and we see it in verse 8. Can we see verse 8? Let's see it. What do you think of it? The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it's going.

So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. So it's not something I do. It's something God does. And here's the word. Ladies and gentlemen, it is a miracle. It's a miracle.

So God brings us back to life as new people in the Spirit world. He radically changes us and our thinking. That's what He was talking about. She was changed, transformed.

So this is a supernatural act of God in which He takes His Holy Spirit and He implants the Spirit in the base of our hearts and He gives us a heart transplant so that our mind and our will and our emotions and our personality head off in a whole new direction.

[21 : 30] And so we start to think like He thinks and consequently we start to long to act in His way which I try and do in a hopeless way myself. And I remember once speaking to a man and I was urging him to become a Christian and he said, look Rico, it's no good me becoming a Christian.

I'll never keep it up. And I said to him, well given your track record, Matt, I agree with you. Do you know the great thing about being in Canada? You don't know who Matt is. It's great, isn't it? I said, I agree with you. I said, I don't think you would.

I said, what do you think would need to happen for you to keep going? And he said, I think a miracle. And I said, that's exactly what we're talking about. We do need a miracle. Exactly. It's a miracle in which the person looks exactly the same.

But actually, there's been a radical change taking place and God has caused us, could this be true, to leap into the spirit world? He's given us a heart transplant.

And you can't do it yourself. Let me tell you what it was like for me. You know, this is what it was like for me. Before it happened to me, I didn't really worry about God. Although I do remember praying that I would pass exams.

[22 : 35] Do you know the prayer? Oh God, please help me pass the exam tomorrow and I'll become a vicar. I know, stupid prayer. Actually, that's why I became a vicar because I didn't pass exams.

But anyway, there you have it. But I didn't care about God as long as he looked after his bits and he left me alone to do mine. Just fill my lungs with oxygen, God, and go.

I didn't care about him. But you know, when God changed me, I started to love him. I really did. And I was so glad at what he'd done for me and it was an amazing change.

And before it happened to me, the Bible was gobbledygook to me. Gobbledygook. I couldn't work out what was going on. In fact, I used to leaf through it between 10 and 13, those ages.

We had scripture lesson once a week. I'd flick through trying to make it relevant by looking for references to rugby. And I found a number I was pleased with. One to referees in John 9 verse 1. I knew a man blind from birth, although that was good.

[23 : 39] One to foul play in Acts 13 verse 3, so Paul and Barnabas were sent off. That was good. But my favourite one was to what I was myself a prop forward in Exodus 30. A stiff-necked people. I was delighted with that, but I couldn't see it was relevant.

But after God changed me, it was amazing. I'd pick up the Bible and I'd try and read it each day and it was as though it had my name and address in it. And I'd read stuff and it would hit me right between the eyes and be utterly relevant to the day that was going to take place and the issues I was facing.

It was extraordinary. And I felt the Lord Jesus walk off its pages. And before I became a Christian, I only ever prayed when I was in trouble. But after God changed me, I wanted to talk to him like a friend, particularly at night.

I'd wake at three in the night and I found it a great comfort to pray. And before I became a Christian, there were many sins that I didn't give a fig about as long as I wasn't found out.

But afterwards, they really became very ugly to me and I hated them because I knew they upset the Lord Jesus. So it was a radical change, a heart transplant. It was being born again.

[24 : 47] And ladies and gentlemen, it's not unlike surgery. Do you know surgery? The anesthetist comes in, plunges something into your arm, and the most wonderful, euphoric feeling comes over you.

Isn't it marvelous? I love it. Do you know, if you've never had surgery and there's a bit of your body you don't really want, get it chopped off just for the feeling. It's marvelous. Oh! And the nurses look absolutely beautiful and they put you on a trolley and it floats by and the doors swing over and there's your surgeon and then suddenly, thump, thump, thump, they say, wake up, it's over, it's over.

And after half an hour, you know they've done something. Within an hour, you wish they hadn't. In three hours, you're afraid you're going to die and in six hours, you're afraid you won't die. So you see, all the good work has gone on underneath and you're not aware of the evidence until later, but that's what the new birth is like.

Now here's the issue. What I kept doing and what I'm asking you to keep doing is keep hearing the Bible, which you can do if you come back 11 o'clock next Sunday.

Just keep hearing the Bible. That's what I did. I kept hearing the Bible and I got to the point when I said, you know, Jesus isn't just a swear word, Rico, which was all I used him as.

[26 : 03] No, actually, he's to be at the center of your life. And God was changing me underneath and I'd start saying, you know, Jesus, I think he really did die for me. I'm connected to that death of his on Good Friday 2,000 years ago.

And I found myself on my knees. Now what I did was I heard the Bible. There's a course beginning. There's one evening on the 14th and a course on the 21st of May and you can hear the Bible.

Please make time to do that. Come back on Sunday to do that. I heard the Bible and the Bible says faith comes by hearing the word of God. Just hear it. So what is new birth?

It's a radical change that God does by his spirit. Who needs the new birth? Ladies and gentlemen, we all do, even Nicodemus. And thirdly, what has God done so that I can be born again?

Can we look down to one of the most famous verses in the Bible, John 3, 16. You may remember this from your childhood. I don't know. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[27 : 13] So what did God do? Do you know he loved the world? That's us. And therefore he gives us the creation around Vancouver. But he doesn't just do that. He gave his one and only son, the Lord Jesus, so God allowed Jesus to die on the cross to take the punishment I deserve.

I don't know. Perhaps you've seen pictures of Jesus hanging on the cross and either side are the two men beside him, the two thieves, and he cries out on that Good Friday words that have echoed through history.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now just hear those words. He's the Son of God. Why is he forsaken?

And the Bible says Jesus was forsaken by God on the cross so that we need never be. He pays for our wrongdoing. I don't know if you've seen the film The Last Emperor.

It's about a young child who lives in China, a magical life surrounded by luxury. He's the last emperor and he has a thousand eunuch servants at his command.

[28 : 21] And his brother says to him, what happens when you do wrong? And he says, when I do wrong, someone else is punished. And to demonstrate, he picks up a beautiful jar and he smashes it.

And then you see one of the servants being beaten. And ladies and gentlemen, in Christianity it is the exact opposite. We the servants err, we do wrong, and the Lord Jesus, the King, is beaten. He is crucified for us. He takes our punishment. It is extraordinary. So he who was without sin took the punishment our sin deserved so that you and I could be right with God.

Jesus died so the new birth can be possible for God is not, here's the issue, he's not going to send the spirit of his son to live in our lives while we're in rebellion against him.

While our fists are shaking against him, however politely. No, you see, while we're in rebellion against him, we need cleansing. So what has God done so that the new birth can come to us?

[29 : 25] He has sent his son to die so that we can be forgiven and he pays in death and blood for my forgiveness. I don't know if you know what your name means. Helen, any Helens here?

It means bright. Paul, little, John, any Johns? It means the gift of God which may be a shock to the person sitting next to you. Anyway, Katie Lee has just left the church I work at in London and she is translating the Bible in Papua New Guinea and she told me that there is a tribe there that likes English sounding words but they don't know what they mean but they've given to calling their children by them and to this day she tells me that there is a little boy in Papua New Guinea called Tinfish and a little girl called Second Gear.

Now, I don't know if you know what the name Jesus means. Do you know Jesus means saviour? So, at the first Christmas the angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary you'll have a son and you'll give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

So, here's the issue. Every time you hear the name Jesus and when I play golf with my rugby friends sometimes I hear it three or four times on one hole but every time you hear it however it is spoken it means the same thing.

It means he died for my sins or in fact he died for me. So, I have a habit of whenever anyone says it even on the golf course I say under my breath he died for me.

[30 : 57] Why don't we try that just under our breath let's not say it out loud but when I say Jesus could you say to yourself in your heart he died for me. Let's practice that.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. It's amazing. He died for me. And ladies and gentlemen that must make you incredibly important that God loved you so much that he sent his one and only son to die so that you can have eternal life.

Well, I want to draw to a close but let me close and as I do that let's just summarize that.

Summarize who needs to be born again? Everybody. Even Nicodemus. What is the new birth? It's something God does by his Holy Spirit not what we do. It's not my performance. It's not me trying harder. It is a miracle. That's what God did in Edie's life. A miracle. Thirdly, what has God done to enable the new birth to come?

He has sent his son to die for us taking the punishment for our sin. And finally, what does God want us to do as we close? Well, it's in verse 16.

[32 : 04] Let's have a look and we'll close with this. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him trusts him will have eternal life.

Now, what does it mean to be trustworthy? It means that you keep your word. So, if I say, well, the first person at the pulpit after the service to here gets \$20. If I'm trustworthy, then I keep my word and give it to you.

I'm not, so don't bother. Okay? But if I'm trustworthy, that's what I do. When you're trustworthy, you keep your word. Now, what does God's word say? What does the Bible say? Do we see as we look down?

What does he say? Here it is. You will not perish, so you won't go to hell. You'll have eternal life.

And if you trust what God's son has done, amazingly, he says, if you trust in what Jesus has done, I'll forgive you and I'll send my spirit to you.

I'll do a miracle. Now, how do we do this? How do we put our trust in Christ so that we receive the Holy Spirit and are forgiven? Well, we do that by making a decision.

[33 : 14] Becoming a Christian involves making a decision. Can I say, it's not like catching mumps. You know what it's like with mumps. Your throat is sore one day and a few days later, it's all up and you've got it. It's not like that.

No, becoming a Christian is like getting married. You don't wake up one morning and say, oh, what happened? What are you doing here? And can I say, if it has been like that for you, you're in need of greater help than we can give you here.

No, no, it's not like that. It's like getting married. I took a wedding recently and I said to the groom, David, will you have Alicia? Did you notice, Will, I didn't say, David, how did you feel?

He was perspiring in the middle of winter. I said, David, Will, what have you made up your mind to do about this young woman? Will you have her for your lawful wedded wife, for richer, for poorer? In sickness and in health, for better, for worse. You know what for better, for worse means, don't you? It means whatever the in-laws are like, for better, for worse. For better, for worse, will you forsake all others and stay with her?

[34 : 13] And he said, I will. That's what I intend to do. And God says to us this morning, what do you intend to do about the death of my son? That's what he says.

He says, what do you intend to do about the death of my son? Will you put your trust in me today and believe that I can make you a new person, as he did with Edie, and that I can forgive you, and that you can start again, and that we can reverse this mess we're in, and you can trust Christ? Or are you saying, you know, do you know what? They're actually, they're bits I'm not going to hand over. Please don't do that. He died on the cross for me.

I can trust him to lead me. Well, I don't know where you stand, but for some people, the taster event on the 14th of May, and then maybe the course where you come and hear the Bible taught and look at Jesus in Mark's gospel will be a great place to ask questions.

And can I say, your questions are incredibly important to us. They're really important. So please come and ask them. We'd love you to do that. But for one or two, you might be saying, do you know, I want to start again this morning.

[35 : 30] I really do. I know this is true. I need to start again. And if that's the case for you, here's a little prayer, and I'm going to read it first so you know exactly what's coming, but then I'll pray it.

And if it's right for you, then can I plead with you to pray it? Can I plead with you to do that? Here's the prayer. So I'll just go through it now. Heavenly Father, you haven't been at the center of my life, but I want you to take your rightful place as master of my life.

Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me. Please forgive me, and please send your spirit to make me into a new person. That's the prayer. And if it's right for you, why not pray it now?

So I'll say it slowly now. It's a prayer to become a Christian, and maybe for one or two, this is right. Let's pray. Here it is. Heavenly Father, you haven't been at the center of my life, but I want you to take your rightful place as master of my life.

thank you for sending Jesus to die. Please forgive me, and please send your spirit to make me into a new person.

[36 : 50] Amen. Well, if you've prayed that, I'll be at the pulpit afterwards, just down the bottom. I'd love to take your name, get a book to you, and pray for you. Thank you very much.

Please join me as we pray. You're welcome to sit or kneel as we pray together. Father, we come with joy this morning, thanking you for the beauty of this city, for the welcome signs of spring. We thank you for creating us and for providing us so richly with all the resources that you've lavished on British Columbia and on Vancouver and on us personally.

But more than all these things, Father, we thank you that you have allowed us to start again. You have brought light and truth into our lives. We have seen light and truth in the face of your son, Jesus Christ.

We thank you that he has set us free so that we can appreciate your love. We thank you for shattering our middle class respectability.

[38 : 07] We thank you for dismissing our inadequate performances as a basis for pleasing you.

We thank you for lifting some of us from our own miry pits and centering our feet on a rock and putting a new song of praise in our hearts to you.

Father, this morning we pray for those who feel that they are beyond hope, beyond rescue, beyond a new start.

Father, help them to appreciate that you do not send your son all the way from eternity to condemn us, to condemn them, but to save them, to save us.

Father, this morning we pray for our leaders. We thank you for Rico's ministry amongst us. We pray for David Short, for Dan Gifford, for Jim Saladin.

[39 : 16] You would bless them and their many responsibilities to shepherd the flock of God. We pray for the progress of the word of God amongst us as it reshapes and remakes us in the image of your son.

we pray for peace and justice in our world. We pray for those who are sick amongst us, those who are lonely, those who are unemployed.
We pray for those who are flourishing that they might remember from whose hand that flourishing comes. In all these things we thank you again for the gift of your son, our savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen. Amen.