

# Faithful to the Promise

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, it's great on your behalf to welcome Rico Tice. Rico has done a weekend of workshops in Toronto.
- He preached this morning somewhere in Toronto, got on a plane, and I met him at the airport at six, and now he's going to preach again for us. But I thought I should ask him some questions so that we know a little bit about him.
- Rico. Rico Tice. Rico Tice. Rico Tice. I can't tell you how many variations of that we've used in our house in the last couple of weeks.
- Where on earth did you get that name from? Well, yeah, it is a stupid name. And on this Mother's Day, I'd just like to say it's entirely her fault. I don't come from a Christian family.
- I come from a tobacco family. And my dad was growing tobacco in Chile when I was born. So I was prisoned Richard. That's Ricardo in Spanish, Sean to Rico. But I am Rico Tice and not Tico Rice.
- [ 0 : 5 9 ] I quite often find... But I was member... Once I was introduced to the church and the minister said, well, it's so wonderful to have an old friend of the church here welcome Tico. And I thought, well, he's obviously a liar.
- He doesn't even have a name. Now, coming from a tobacco family, Rico, how did you come to faith in Christ? Yeah, I came from a loving home but not a Christian home.
- I think the Christian ethic was very important to my parents. But we certainly knew nothing of real faith in the person of Jesus Christ. I was... Because my dad worked abroad, he went to Africa after Chile.
- When I was eight years old, I was sent to boarding school in England. I'm all right now. I've just about recovered. But I got sent to boarding school. And I really thought nothing of the Christian faith until when I was about 15, 16, two things happened to me at school.
- The first was I kept a diary, a record of each day, because I thought I was such a great guy. I owed it to the world to record my life. And I found out I was a total Burke. Do you use that word Burke over here? It's an Australian word.
- [ 1 : 5 7 ] Oh, right, yeah. I just found out that there was a terrible selfishness in my life. So that was the first thing that happened. And I was staggered by that, by my own selfishness and that of my contemporaries in the boarding house.
- I remember there was a guy in the air above me. And he had epilepsy. And sometimes he'd be locked in a study with a stroboscope to induce a fit. And that was the sort of level of behavior that went on.
- And I just remember thinking, there is something desperately wrong with us. So that was the first experience. The second was on the 6th of August, 1982, my godfather was killed in a cliff fall, actually here in Canada.
- He'd emigrated. He loved sailing. He'd been for a sail. And he went for a walk on an island. There was a tree. He tried to get around it.

And he slipped. And he fell to his death. And that was just a massive paradigm shift for me because no one I'd really loved had died at that point. And no one in my family had any answer to death.

[ 2 : 52 ] So I think those two issues of my own selfishness and my godfather's death made me start looking. And it was amazing to me to find that the answer to my godfather's death was in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day.

And the answer to my diary was in the death of Jesus on Good Friday. And that was just amazing to me to suddenly feel that, gosh, I can find forgiveness for guilt. I can find hope in the face of death.

And that was the beginning of the Christian faith, really. How did that happen? How did you find those things? There was a small Christian meeting at school. There was a maths teacher who ran that meeting.

And my older brother took me along to that meeting. And there were probably 10 or 15 boys that went along to that in a school of 650. But that was where I really discovered the person of Christ.

Was it a dramatic conversion? No, it was over an 18-month period, I think. Over 18 months. I can't put a day on when I became a Christian. But over 18 months, I found the person of Christ just grew and grew and grew for me.

[ 3 : 51 ] And that was how it happened. Rico, what are you doing now with your life? What do you do? Well, I went to university and I got a third, which is the worst degree you can get. And I realised that ordination in the Anglican Church was the only career option available, really.

So I took that. In fact, I remember when I got my third, I said to my tutor, was I close to a 2-2? He said, no, Rico, it was a very solid third. And I thought, well, that's guidance.

And I got ordained, I suppose, 11 years ago now. And I've spent my time at one church. I have no ambition to run a church. I see myself as a lifelong number two.

I think the key to that is incompetence, actually. If you are incompetent, then you can be a lifelong number two. And what I do at my local church is spend my time trying to help the church family and myself present the person of Christ to those people investigating him.

And that's a real thrill. And I've written this little course, Christianity Explored, with my colleagues who are here, Barry Cooper and Sam Seamus. They've both been a massive help in writing that.

[ 4 : 55 ] And really, what we want people to do is just investigate the person of Christ as he walks off the pages of Mark's Gospel. So that's what we do. And to that end, I've got this little book here that I've written.

The sales are magnificent. We've sold four this year so far. It's really going terribly well. And I wrote this particularly for my rugby friends, actually. So no word is longer than five letters.

And there are bits to colour in. So it's perfect for them. And again, it's just the opportunity to look at the person of Christ. Well, we look forward to hearing you teach from the Bible.

I think, Deidre, you're going to come and read the Bible for us now. The reading tonight is taken from the book of Luke, chapter 15, verses 11 through 32.

And this can be found in your bulletin. That's Luke, chapter 15, verses 11 through 32. Jesus continued.

[ 6 : 04 ] There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, Father, give me my share of the estate. So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am, starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

[ 7 : 20 ] He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. The son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants, Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

Your brother has come, he replied. And your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound. The older brother became angry and refused to go in.

[ 8 : 18 ] So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, Look, all these years I have been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him. My son, the father said, You are always with me and everything I have is yours.

But we had to celebrate and be glad because this father of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. This is the word of the Lord.

And I invite you to stand, please. And if you're a follower of Christ, let's join together in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried.

[ 9 : 43 ] He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. He has your come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, it's a great privilege to be here.

Thank you very much for coming out this evening. I'll be looking to address people particularly who are wanting to investigate the Christian faith this evening. And to that end, I'm going to go through probably the most famous short story ever told.

[ 10 : 57 ] So as we begin, let me say a prayer. Let's pray together. Father God, thank you so much for the stories Jesus told and for the relevance they have to all of our lives.

We pray this evening that you would speak to each one of us in the very depths of our being. And we ask this for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Recently, a friend who lives hundreds of miles from me in London rang me.

And he said on the phone, he said, Rico, I'm reaching out. He said, the doctor says I've had a bit of a breakdown. Really, it's because of the products I sell people. I've been lying to people for years and the pressure of that has now broken me.

I'm also missing my children desperately since the divorce. Christmas was agony. And to top it all, a friend of mine has just lost his young wife from cancer. He keeps ringing me.

I have no idea what to say to him. Do you know, in the British culture, I have no idea the culture here. But in the British culture, it takes quite a lot for a sort of self-reliant individual who runs his own business to make a phone call like that.

[ 12 : 05 ] Quite a lot for a sort of self-sufficient guy to do it. And I guess the question is, what do you say to him? What on earth do you say as he says that on the phone? And to be honest, I really did want to take him, as he spoke to me, to this parable, to this story that Jesus told.

Because it's about life. It explains life. It's about being human. It's about the mess that life can be. It's about actually sometimes having the courage to look in the mirror and admit that despair is not far away.

And I'm actually just at this moment clinging on by my fingernails. Or am I the only one? It's about an emptiness that can gnaw at the soul. And it's about broken relationships. Broken domestic relationships.

And in London, we all know about that. But this is the point. Above all, this story is about experiencing a relationship of such generosity, such love, that it can turn any life around, including that of my friend that rang me.

That's why it's the most famous short story ever told. Because it's got such power, such pathos, such meaning. This story changes lives. It has changed the lives of countless numbers of people.

[ 13 : 11 ] And my hope this evening is that you will find it will change your life. So let's have a look at it together. It's a family story, really. I wonder if you can see it there on the bulletin in front of you. If you could open up to it in the center there, it would be a great help for me if you could have it open.

That would be terrific. And it's a family story. It has a father who, it's about a father who has two sons. And on Mother's Day, I really don't know where the mother was. And maybe these two boys wouldn't have got in such a mess if their mother had been around.

I don't know. But a friend of mine tells it very neatly, this story. He says, Rico, it goes a bit like this. He says, it starts at home, then the younger son gets sick of being home. So he gets out.

And eventually he goes to being plain sick. So he goes to being homesick. And it ends with him being home again. The father's thrilled to have him home. Throws a party. And the older brother's sick about that. He says, basically, that's the story.

The story goes something like that. And as Jesus tells the story, it becomes very obvious that the father in the story is like God. And the two sons, the younger son and the older son, are the two groups of people listening to the story.

[ 14 : 13 ] They're the two constituencies of people listening. Do you use that word, constituency? If I look, if I don't get a word right, just put your hand up and say, listen, you fat Englishman, that's the wrong word.

And then we'll get on better. But the two constituencies are here, you see. There's the younger son's constituency, who's actually in chapter 15, verse 1. They are the tax collectors and sinners. They're listening. And then the older brother's constituency are the Pharisees and teachers of the law, Luke 15, verse 2.

And this is what's so staggering about the story. This is why it's so riveting. You see, Jesus actually intends all of us to see ourselves in the story. It's as though he holds up a mirror. And he says, where are you?

He says, actually, you've got a walk-on part in this story. I don't know if you ever knew that. You've probably known this story a while. Maybe you've heard it many times before. But I don't know if you realise that you're in the story.

You're to identify with one of these two constituencies. So let's have a look at these two boys. And I've just got two headings. And the first is, there is a deceptive contrast between these boys.

[ 15 : 13 ] A deceptive contrast. And as I go through it, the question is, where do you see yourself as you walk into the story? So let's have a look at the story. And we begin the story with the first of the two, the younger of the two sons.

And he's what you might call the out-and-out rebel. And he's in verse 12. Can we see? The younger one said to his father, Father, give me my share of the estate. So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had and set off for a distant country. Now this younger son cuts loose. And he takes what would have been his later on. And he says, well, you know, I'd like it now.

So he says, Dad, Dad, do you know that life insurance policy you've taken out for me? And his father says, yes. He says, well, Dad, I'd like my share now. And the father says, well, actually, son, those things only mature when I die.

And the son says, yeah, Dad, you've got the point. I wish you were dead. That's what he's saying. You see, he wants his father's inheritance now. Well, you get your father's inheritance when he dies. And this younger son, you see, what he's in fact saying to his father is he's saying, Father, I want your things, but I don't want you.

[ 16 : 21 ] That's what he's saying. So you see, the father in the story is a bit like God. And some people are a bit like this younger son. And they treat God in this way. So they just walk out on him and they act as though he doesn't exist, as though he's an irrelevance.

And they say, listen, God, I want your gifts, but I don't want you. This is an amazing land. Apparently there are 250,000 lakes in Canada. I worked out that if I swam in 100 lakes a day, it would still take me seven years.

I mean, it's incredible. What a place to live. And they're people who take the gifts, fun, family, friends, falling in love, food, fitness, whatever it is. But they reject the giver. And they say, look, I'll just run my life my own way.

I may get each breath from God, but I'm running my life my own way. And their slogan, I wonder if you can see it, it's very clear. There it is, verse 12. Father, give me. Give me.

You give me the gifts and then you get out. And I'll run my life my own way. And I guess the question is, what was it that so attracted this young man to life without God? And I think the answer is, this was his Independence Day.

[ 17 : 28 ] So that's what it was. He wanted to be on his own. He didn't want to be dependent on God. So he was saying to God, look, I don't need you, God. And I wonder if you can imagine what a great feeling he'd had as he was walking down the drive with the remains of a life insurance in his back pocket.

Absolutely watchful. And he was thinking, I'm free. And he's convinced, you see, this is it. He's convinced that pleasure will lead to happiness. Independence, wild living pleasure, that will make me happy.

And so give me, and he's gone. Well, that's the younger son. Let's have a look now at the older son. He's what you might call the establishment figure. And again, this may be more relevant for you.

It may be that you see yourself better with him. And we need to go to the end of the story to see him. I wonder if you can see him in verse 29. And he's having a row with his father at his brother's party outside.

And he tells us a bit about himself in verse 29. He says, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. So do you see, he's a moralist. He's lived a good life.

[ 18 : 29 ] He's the dutiful child, the dutiful oldest son. He's joined the family firm. He's hardworking. He's loyal. You know, he's something boring, isn't he? Like a solicitor or an accountant. It's obvious, isn't it?

Yeah, sorry. And where the father is, he's close around. So, you know, if the father was in St. John's Shaughnessy Sunday morning, he'd be there. He'd probably be an elder or on the PCC or whatever. He's a fine, outstanding chap at every level.

But you see, he's very different from his brother, but it's a deceptive contrast. He's nothing like his brother, but he's nothing like his father either. And we see that in verse 28. Do we see verse 28?

The older brother, when the younger brother comes home, became angry and refused to go in. So you see, the younger son arrives and the father's glad. The brother's angry.

Typical accountant. So much repressed anger. You see, the father's glad. The brother's angry. The father greets him with open arms. The brother with clenched fists. The father says, my son. Verse 30, it's so striking.

[ 19 : 29 ] Can you see? Verse 30, but when this son of yours? He says, I won't even admit I've been in the same womb as this boy. We don't even have the same genetic code. So you see, this older brother thought he was the model of unselfishness.

But actually, verse 29, he uses the words I, me or my four times. He's absolutely self-obsessed. One person has said about the older brother, the elder son contrived without leaving home to be as far away from his father as ever his brother was in the pigsty.

And you see, I mean, selfish, self-centered people are such a pain, aren't they? It was Samuel Butler who wrote about two very selfish people, Mr. and Mrs. Carlisle. And he wrote this, how good of God to cause Carlisle and Mrs. Carlisle to marry one another and so make two people miserable instead of four.

And he's just self-obsessed. And you know, here's the issue. If you want to think about Christianity in terms of religion, then these two are very different. But if you want to think about the Christian faith as the Lord Jesus calls us to think about it, which is in terms of relationship with God, well, actually, they're very similar, these boys.

I mean, it's a deceptive contrast. One's religious, the other's not. One's respectable, the other's not. But they're both out of relationship with their father. And I guess at this point, as we draw to a close on the first point, what about you?

[ 20 : 52 ] I mean, if you're in the younger son's constituency, well, I guess you know that. And can I say, it's great to have you here tonight. It's wonderful you've come along and we appreciate having you if you're in the younger son's constituency and you've been in a far land and you're back this evening.

But are you, here's the question, an older brother, a respectable conventional type, but if you're honest, your religion has as much in common with real relationship with God as a frigid marriage has in common with a real lifelong love story.

And the Anglicanism I grew up with as a schoolboy was right at the centre of the older brother. And I think you can diagnose it, you can diagnose someone who has that religion by this.

This is the issue, I think. It's if their religion and their religious practice makes them feel superior to other people. So they come along to church and they say, do you know what this country needs?

It's more law-abiding, tax-paying, moral citizens like me. If only there were more people like me, the country wouldn't be in this mess. And here I am Sunday, I'm in church and, you know, these peasants, my neighbours aren't.

[ 22 : 05 ] If only there were more people like me. Feeling superior to other people. That was exactly the Anglicanism I grew up with, exactly. And it was far, far away from relationship with God.

Well, it's a deceptive contrast, but secondly, my second point, both these boys make an amazing discovery. They both discover they're equally welcome with their father. They both find it, but it's clearer with the younger son. Let's rejoin him.

He's relishing his independence, verse 13. There he is, enjoying pleasure. And we read verse 13. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had and set off for a distant country and squandered his wealth in wild living.

And the word squandered there has a sense of hollowness. So it's a sense that he wasted his life. You only get one life, and he wasted it. And he finds that alcohol and promiscuity, they may lead to gratification.

They may lead to instant pleasure, but he finds they don't lead to happiness. And what this young man finds, you see, it's very striking, is not freedom but bondage.

[ 23 : 07 ] It's amazing. He left home to be in control, but he finds he's totally out of control. And verse 14, he finds he's in a pigsty. That's where he finds himself. And verse 16, he finds himself totally isolated once the money runs out.

And verse 16 is so striking. Do we see it's one of the saddest phrases in the Bible? But no one gave him anything. So he is totally alone. And he finds that he's surrounded not by givers but takers.

I think there are only two types of people in life. There are givers and takers. And this man suddenly finds that actually these people who surround him are takers. And he's got no money, no friends, no job. He's incredibly alone.

And what happens? What does he do? Well, now we come to the halfway point in the parable. Because do you see the start of verse 17? Can you see the bulletins as we look down? When he came to his senses.

So you see, coming to your senses means that he's, it means becoming sane. So he suddenly goes, how could I have been so blind? How could I have been so ungrateful? How could I have missed the obvious? And he starts to see himself as he really is.

[ 24 : 11 ] And he starts to see his father as he really is. And he begins to surrender his precious delusions about independence. And he admits he's lost and he's in a pigsty. And he says, you know, I don't just lack my father's food.

I lack my father. I miss him. Can we have a look down? You see, there it is. I'll say to him, father, I've sinned against you. Verse 19. So he got up and went to his father. Verse 20.

But while he was a long way off, his father. He starts, and this is so relevant for mothering Sunday. He starts missing home. Now what's home?

Home isn't a place, isn't it? Fundamentally, home is a relationship. One psychiatrist has written, children who don't experience a home live all their lives with a fundamental inability of attachment.

And home is the place where I belong and I'm accepted. That's home. It's the place where people know all about me and they love me anyway. That's home.

[ 25 : 09 ] But this young boy, you see, he finds that when the money runs out, he is no longer accepted. In other words, his relationships are not unconditional. They're conditional.

That's just like the West End of London where I work. We will love you if you're young, if you're rich, if you live in the right place, if there is the money. But if that is missing, their love is withdrawn. And don't you think it's why so many people are driven?

Because they've had programmed in, unless I succeed, I will not be loved, so I must succeed. I'm grateful for my school days. That was exactly what was programmed in. You will not be loved unless you succeed.

But at home, at home you're loved anyway. At home they know all about you and they love you anyway and they accept you. And you see, this young boy, you see, he changes his mind about himself and above all, he changes his attitude to God and then he does something which is so difficult and I hate doing this.

He swallows his pride and he realises he's got to go home and say to his father, Dad, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You see, verse 18, he says, I'll set out and go to my father and say, Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you.

[ 26 : 18 ] He knows. He doesn't just lack his father's fellowship or his father's food. He lacks his father's forgiveness and so he's got to say sorry. And I hate it.

Don't you? I hate saying sorry. I think, I realise I've got to ring up and say sorry to someone and I pick up the phone to ring them and I find it's got teeth and I sort of put it back down and think, I'll just have a cup of tea and I delay it all day saying sorry.

And the Bishop of London recently said, he said, London's biggest problem is BSE. We looked at each other, BSE, he said, yes, blame somebody else. And I don't know, I speak of marriage now with all the reckless courage of a non-competent but I'm told in married life there are two crucial phrases.

And actually, as I come out with these phrases, can all the marrieds keep their elbows in please? I don't want to see the elbows flying left and right here. So elbows in please for the marrieds. But I'm told these are the two key phrases in married life.

Phrase number one, I'm sorry I was wrong. And phrase number two, that's okay, I forgive you. And marriages break up because some people will never say sorry and marriages break up because some people will never forgive.

[ 27 : 28 ] But this boy you see, he realises he's got to say sorry and I wonder if you can imagine him rehearsing, walking up and down the pigsty saying, right, I've got to go and I've got to say that. And you know, he's walking up and down but he knows he's got to say it.

And don't you think that the hardest steps he ever took were there, verse 18, I'll set out and go back to my father. Don't you think he dawdled a bit? But he said, right, I've got to head for home.

And now we come to the heart of the story, verse 18, so he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him. Now what does his father say? Does his father stand on the porch, arms folded and go, this better be good.

This better be good. What's his father going to do? Can we see as we look down? While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.



Now in the Greek, that word is the turning of the stomach. So when you saw the pictures of the tsunami and you saw the desperate suffering and mothers without their children and your stomach turned, that's what the father felt as he saw his boy.

[ 28 : 29 ] And he ran to him. Has anyone here ever seen the queen run? Has anyone ever seen the queen run? Can I say it would be unheard of in our culture to see that good lady run.

I mean, we just couldn't imagine it if she ran. Well in this culture, nobleman didn't run but he doesn't care what the neighbours think and he runs and perhaps he ran across one of the fields that had to be sold for the life insurance and he jumps across the hedge and he throws himself and it's terribly un-British this bit now and it's present continuous.

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him and kissed him so he goes on kissing him. I just, I mean psychologically as an Englishman I can't handle it. It's too much for me. My father and I, you know bedtime, I love him very much.

I say night father, good night and we shake hands. That's all we can manage. But he throws his arms around him and you know, this is the issue. It's one thing to know that your father loves you but it's another to have him embrace you and kiss you and I guess the question is how do we experience the father's kiss?

And the answer's here, do you see, how do I feel the kiss of the heavenly father? Can you see it's here? Verse 17, you come to your senses and you come to understand that it's home where you belong and you're accepted.

[ 29 : 49 ] That's where you've got a head for home and then the moment of embrace is when you say to the Lord, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. And that's why it's such a lovely thing to read the Bible each morning because as you look at the Bible, you know the Bible is like a mirror and you see your wrongdoing and then as you say sorry, you feel his embrace and that's why it's just agony that some Christians have stopped reading the Bible in the morning and if it's you, then we need to start again and pray I'll do it too.

But you see, the father's waiting and watching and no, the son's been in a far country, the father's been going, where are you? And then the boy, verse 21, goes straight into the rehearsed speech. Father, he says, I've sinned against heaven and against you, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son and he gets halfway through and the father says, bring the best robe, a sign of honour, put a ring on his finger, a sign of authority, shoes on his feet, a slave didn't have shoes, a servant didn't have shoes, a son had shoes.

Bring the fattened calf, kill it. It said the only person who wasn't pleased to see the son come home was the calf. But you see, here's the issue. This is the issue.

He has totally, totally misunderstood his father's generosity and his father, as he comes home, isn't going to treat us as we deserve. He's not going to grind our faces into the mud.

He's so generous with us. About five years ago, I was on my day off at home and I was teaching my nephews, Dalton and Patrick, they're my brother's little boys, to play rugby, to scrummage on my day off.

[ 31 : 20 ] It's the sort of thing clergy do on their day off. Anyway, I was on the ground with the five-year-old Dalton teaching him to push and at that point, Patrick, the little two-and-a-half-year-old, got so excited that he picked up a large plant pot in my parents' sitting room and decided to make a pitch, a field and he started to put mud all over the floor and when I next looked up, there was mud everywhere and at that point, my mother, Patrick's grandmother, who's known affectionately in the family as the Ayatollah, walked in.

So she walked in the door. She's totally dominant. The last independent decision my father made in the household, as far as I can see, in 45 years of marriage, is to recognise Angola as a sovereign state.

She's absolutely dominant. Anyway, in walked my mother and the floor was trashed and she walked over to her little grandson, Patrick and she picked up the plant pot and she put it on one side and she picked him up and she kissed him and she said, let's go and have lunch.

And as she carried him across the mud, he looked over her shoulder at Dalton and I on the floor and he went, like that. You see, the thing about Patrick is he knows that his grandmother knows what he's done.

He knows that she loves him anyway and he knows that she'll clear up the mess. And you know, I'd love to say that after being a Christian for 20 years that my relationship with God is any different but it's not.

[ 32 : 45 ] But it's so easy to say sorry to someone, you know, when they have loved you like that. When they're that generous. It's so easy. And it's such a wonderful thing to be so secure in that relationship of unconditional love.

But actually, you know, this younger son, he was fortunate, wasn't he, to be seen by his father on the road and not by his brother. I mean, his brother wouldn't have given him such a generous welcome not least because of verse 31. Can we see verse 31?

And everything I have is yours. Have you ever thought of that? So it means that when the father said bring the best robe, ultimately it would be inherited by the older brothers. The younger son's inheritance, he'd already spent it.

This was the older brothers. Bring the best ring, ultimately it was the older brothers. Kill the calf, ultimately it was the older brothers. So you see, there was a big cost to this son coming home. There was the ring, there was the robe, there was the calf, and there was no way this selfish, stingy older brother would pay it.

But the amazing thing about being Christian is that we have a different older brother. In Romans 8 verse 29, we are told that the Lord Jesus is our older brother, the true older brother, and he earned everything.

[ 33 : 53 ] He earned the robe, he earned the ring. You can look at his life and you can see that he lived a perfect life. But at the end of his life, what happened? He was stripped of his robe and they cast lots for it.

He didn't get the fattened calf on the cross, he got hyssop and vinegar. And this true older brother says to us, as he dies on the cross, the only way for you to be clothed is for me to be stripped.

And the only way for you to get the robe in the ring is for me to lose mine. And in fact, he says, the only way for you, Rico, to be forgiven, for you to come home, is if I pay in death and blood on the cross so that you can be forgiven.

That's what he does. It's a terrible price to come home. And the Lord Jesus, as he dies on the cross, it's not just a Galilean carpenter dying. He dies there in my place and pays the penalty for my wrongdoing.

And in fact, you know, there's only one way to hell. There's only one way. The only way you get to hell is you trample over the cross of Jesus. He blocks the way and he says, don't go, I'm paying.

[ 35 : 03 ] I'm paying for your wrongdoing. But the only way to get there is if you trample over the cross. Just walk straight over it. And I'm pleading with you not to do that.

And I wonder if you can see from this passage what the Lord Jesus is saying today as he dies on the cross and as he tells this story. He's saying, particularly to those who are younger brothers, he's saying, will you please come home?

Why don't you come home? I've paid the price for you to come home and my father will be so generous with you. And it is the place where you belong and are accepted. He's saying, please come home.

And that friend of mine I was on the phone to, I just wish he could understand this. The generosity of God. And let's close now. But you know, this younger brother, you see, he just totally underestimated God's generosity.

He'd never have left home if he'd understood it. He'd never have left home. And my question is, have you done that? And let's just close now. That's the question if you're the younger brother. But just briefly as we finish now, this older brother, let's just have a look at him.

[ 36 : 12 ] Because you see, the younger son comes home and he flips. He's absolutely furious. Do you see verse 28? The older brother became angry and refused to go in. And he has a public row with his father.

Now it's interesting. If you look in the Old Testament at Deuteronomy chapter 21, to publicly humiliate and disagree with your parents was a capital offence.

So, you know, we don't even in our schools believe in corporal punishment. We don't believe in that. I have no issue with that. But these people believed in capital punishment. Oh, we're having a bit of problem with Jones Minor.

Right. We'll hang him on Thursday morning. That should sort it out. So this older brother publicly disagrees with his father, which in the Old Testament is a capital offence.

And yet, he thinks he's done nothing wrong. And can you see his weapon of rebellion against his father and the reason he will not go in. It's very striking. It's verse 29. He says, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

[ 37 : 13 ] In other words, what stops the older brother from joining his father, his weapon of rebellion against God, is his own goodness.

He says, because I'm a good person, I have no need of going into the party and no need of doing what you ask, father. You're very lucky to have me around. And I'll make up the rules and welcoming back this whoremongering younger brother is not in the rules.

And you, God, will do as I say. And the Pharisees, of course, chapter 15, verse 2, that was exactly the issue. They never believed that they needed forgiveness from God.

Never. And the people who are farthest from God are the religious people who say, because I'm a good person, I have no need of forgiveness. Other people need forgiveness, not me.

And there can be people who've sat in church for years, but they've never really confessed their wrongdoing and really said, Father, will you lead me?

[ 38 : 15 ] That was my grandmother. What put me into the ministry was watching my grandmother die from the 1st to the 7th of April, 1988. And she died absolutely convinced that because she was a good person, God would accept her.

And over those days, there was an increasing loss of assurance. And after she died, she had 500 pounds in her purse. She couldn't move. She had 500 pounds in her purse.

And my mother said she liked to keep it by her. It made her feel secure. And I'm saying, please understand that your own goodness will never, never cause you to be accepted by God.

And actually, it could be a weapon of rebellion against him. And it's amazing, this story. You know it's unfinished. We don't know if the younger son was just a flash in the pan. It's tantalizing.

We don't know if the older brother went in. We don't know. And the reason we don't know is that we're to finish the story ourselves. We're to write the ending ourselves. And the question is, as the Lord says, come home, what ending will you give to the story?

[ 39 : 23 ] You're in the story, you see. You're in the story and there's this call to come home. It's all paid for by our older brother, the Lord Jesus. But the question is, older brother or younger brother, will you come home?

That's the question. And actually, there's no more important question in all the world.